

Sleuthing The Scriptures

Volume I

To Better Understand
The Mind Of God

Chuck Ness

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Volume I

By Cuck Ness

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Dedication

To my mother-in-law
Tina Salisbury

Many years ago when no one else believed in my ability, it was Tina who had confidence in my potential. When I first started writing, she was the one who burned the midnight oil, correcting and educating me on how to write. Explaining certain aspects of writing that have become the pedestal for which my ability is based upon. Tina put up with my constant stubbornness as she continued to read articles I wrote, many of which other editors would have tossed into the trash. Yet, with love and nerve wracking patience, she spent the time needed to help me get better. She even gave me a podium, by sharing my work on her blog with the Chico Enterprise Record Newspaper. She consistently told me that if I truly wanted to write, and took her advice then I could overcome the bad writing habits I had. Maybe the biggest lesson I learned was when to delete things I added just because I wanted to say something. It's amazing how many times I now delete whole paragraphs, because they just don't add anything to what I'm writing about. Thank you Tina, you totally destroyed the bad rap mother-in-laws get.

Knowledgments

In the process of writing this book, I have been blessed to have numerous brothers and sisters in Christ help in more ways than I could have imagined. I never wrote a book before, and when I set about doing so I turned to those I have high respect for, because I knew they would have my best interests at heart.

First I want to thank my wife Sharee, for her understanding as I spent countless hours ignoring her while locked up in my office writing this book, and for her keen eye in helping me create my book cover. Thank you my love.

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My good friend Adam Lustig, has become a spiritual father to me in more ways than he could imagine. Adam, your willingness to read things I send you, and your ability to look beyond what I wrote, so that you can help me better present things, has been a blessing to me. Ever since I met you, you have been willing to help me deal with situations in a more Godly manner than I would have if it were not for you. If we're not for you, I would not have taken the next step needed to actually go forward with this book. Thank you for your continued support and wisdom.

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My dearest sister Angie, I want to extend my deepest appreciation for the way you and Steve have gone out of your way to make sure your baby brother did not make a fool out of himself by publishing this book. Your advice and support is more appreciated than you could ever know.

I would be remiss if I failed to thank Lynn Clark, for her hours of editing prowess. Thank you Randy Leckliter, Monika Beyer, Jose Barajas, and Robert Boone for the time you have all taken to read some drafts for chapters of this book, so I could get feedback on ways to correct and improve them.

Finally, thank you Lord Jesus, for sending the Helper so I could gain the wisdom and understanding I needed to write this book. I also pray those who are searching, will find the help they need to better understand YOUR mind. Your servant, *Chuck Ness*

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Chapter 1

Phylacteries

GOD spoke to Moses from a burning bush, and said go down Moses, way down to Egypt land and tell old Pharaoh to let MY people go. So Moses obeyed GOD, and after 10 plagues devastated the once powerful nation, GOD had Moses leading HIS people to the promised land. On the way they took a 40 year detour into the desert, because the people didn't have faith that GOD could do what HE promised. In those 40 years, GOD educated their children about the precepts HE expected them to live by. In them, HE created a kingdom of priests and a holy nation that would one day be the source of the Messiah, through Whom, fallen man could once again walk their Creator in the cool of the day.

"You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel." So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the LORD commanded him."

(Exodus 19:4-7)

Through Moses, GOD gave the Israelites a law that would cover every aspect of their life while promising that if they kept it, HE would have their back forever. Yet GOD knew they were a stubborn bunch and would not remember the law, so HE told them how they could be assured to always keep the law. One way to train one's mind into remembering things is through repetition. Repetition has historically

been a successful way to educate people. So GOD commanded the people to learn the law, and to do so diligently while also teaching their children, so that when they get older the law will always be in the forefront of their consciousness.

“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.”

(Deuteronomy 6:6-8)

Many believe this Scripture is what led to the use of phylacteries among Jewish men, and especially by the religious leaders. They were small leather boxes containing Hebrew texts on vellum, worn at morning prayer as a reminder to keep the law. It was a case of contention with Jesus in that he chastised the Pharisees about the way they used them. Do not misunderstand me, Christ wasn't chastising them for the use of these phylacteries, but rather for the way they went overboard in their attempt to act more righteous for wearing them. They wore these in a way that made the people feel guilty for not being as righteous and pious as themselves. By guiltifying them, the Pharisees were able to put heavy burdens upon the people they themselves would not follow.

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse

the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and."
(Matthew 23:25-28)

The idea is we should have the word of God in the forefront of our minds. We don't do this by strapping boxes of Scripture onto our forehead or strapping the Bible to our arms, but rather by constantly studying and reading the word. By doing so, we are assured to know what is right or wrong, so that we will not be led astray by fables and false commandments from wolves in shepherd's clothing who have turned from the truth. Like all Jewish boys, the disciples themselves would have been required to attend school so they would grow up understanding the teachings of Moses. Paul admonishes Timothy, and thus us all, to be good students of Scripture so we will always be ready.

Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.
(2 Timothy 2:14-15)

This is why I emphasize the reading of a Proverb and a few Psalms every day, along with your normal reading and studying routine. Even if life gets in the way, do your best to at least read the Proverb that coincides with the day of the Month. This way you will be assured to read the book of proverbs once a Month, and in time GOD's wisdom will be at the forefront of your mind. We can never be too prepared for what lays ahead for us in this world. You never know when the Holy Spirit will lead another Christian your way who needs an answer to a problem they have about the Word, one who is stumbling in their walk,

or even a contrarian who needs correcting. It's incumbent upon us to always be prepared in and out of season to share the reason for your faith and to defend the truth.

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

(2 Timothy 4:1-5)

I pray those who have ears to hear will hear His voice and call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

Chapter 2

To Walk Circumspectly As If You Are Already In Heaven

We are all hopeless sinners, who live in a corrupted body continually under attack by the principalities and powers of the rulers of the darkness,¹ who are crouching at our door² with desires to sift us like wheat. While atheists are clueless of their eternal damnation for rejecting Christ, Christians understand the ramifications of stumbling in our walk with Him. Its for this reason we should all listen to the warning Jesus gave Peter the night HE was to be betrayed,

“And the Lord said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.”

(Luke 22:31-32)

In that warning are the words, “and when you have returned to ME.” Just as Jesus knew Peter would deny HIM three times, Jesus also knew Peter would repent and return to HIM. Thus, Jesus' words are proof that He knows about our future trials and tribulations, and how we will fail HIM from time to time. Yet, HIS words also have encouragement for us, because HIS love for us is so great that HE looks forward to us returning to HIM if and when we do fail.

The moment we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we get a spiritual tattoo on our forehead that becomes a bullseye for Satan and his minions. They will attack your mind with temptations of things you have fallen for in the past, along with temptations from places you

¹ Genesis 4:7 NASB

² Ephesians 6:12

would never have imagined could be possible. The question many Christians struggle with is how to be assured they will defeat those temptations, and thus live a life worthy of Christ?

My first suggestion is something I will repeat throughout this book, and that is to always wear the full armor of GOD;³ afterall, only a fool would walk into battle unprepared. Christians need to understand that the moment you give your life to Christ, you will be tattooed with a spiritual bullseye on your chest that every minion of Satan can see. Mind you, the one and only job of demons is to attack you at all times, so it behooves you to always take up your armor so you can fight the good fight. By wearing the shoes of peace, the belt of truth, the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, and the sword of the Spirit, you will learn how to walk in such a way that no spiritual harm can ever come upon you. Paul refers to this as walking circumspectly.

“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

(Ephesians 5:15-16)

Circumspectly is an adverb of the word circumspect, which descends from the Latin word “*circum*” meaning “*around, roundabout*,” while “*spek*,” means to, “*turn or bend*”.⁴ This implies the act of surveying all possible consequences before making a decision. The actual Greek used by Paul is ἀκριβῶς,⁵ pronounced *akribōs*, which means “*exactly,*” “*perfectly,*” or “*diligently.*” Adding all these together, suggests the exercise of forethought that should prompt one to walk while being cautious and wise in how you handle or relate to situations so as not to make foolish mistakes. Which brings to mind what Jesus told HIS disciples when HE sent them out to preach that the kingdom of heaven was at hand.

³ Ephesians 6:10-17

⁴ Online Etymology Dictionary © 2001-2022 Douglas Harper
<https://www.etymonline.com/word/circumspect>

⁵ The Complete Biblical Library, part 1, 16-volume series on the New Testament.
Volume 11: GREEK-GAMMA. ©world copyright 1986

*“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.
Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.”*
(Mark 10:16)

As long as we live in this world, Satan’s minions will be constantly attacking us, while putting stumbling blocks of temptation before us as. It should not shock anyone that the evil serpent would try to steal our soul. After all, Jesus faced temptations every day he lived in this world, just as we do. Yet if we have the faith of a mustard seed⁶ then we can accomplish everything that is in accordance with our Fathers’s will. Everything, not just some of what HE so desires for us, but everything HE desires for us to accomplish.

So then, how can we accomplish everything HE desires for us to accomplish? By keeping our eyes on the One who walked amongst us. Remember, throughout Christ’s ministry in the world, His disciples were all protected from any harm.⁷ Nothing, but their own insecurities and weak faith kept them from walking as Jesus did. Just as Peter had the faith to walk out onto the water, so too can we do things beyond our own ability if we keep our eyes and minds upon Him. Yet, the moment Peter allowed the weather to take his mind and eyes off Jesus, he began to sink into the water. Which is exactly what happens to us when we allow the worries and cares of this world to take our eyes and minds off Him.

*“So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of
the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he
saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and
beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"*
(Matthew 14:29-30)

It’s incumbent upon each and every Christian to understand that the moment we do as Peter did, the result will be the same. Each and every time we take our eyes and minds off of our Lord and Savior, Jesus

⁶ Matthew 17:20

⁷ John 7:12

Christ, we will fail; yet even so, Peter pleaded with Christ to save him, something we too must do when we fail. Just as HE did for Peter, Jesus will save and forgive us of all our transgressions. Remember, to never take your eyes and minds off the only One ⁸who can keep you from sinking into temptation. Instead of walking as if we are alive in the world, we must walk as if we are dead to it, while walking like we are already in Heaven. I know it's not an easy task, but that is why we must always remember to call upon Jesus. When we do, Jesus promised to be faithful by giving us the strength we need to walk circumspectly; thus, we should always set our minds on the things above, instead of things below in this fallen world. This is exactly what Paul told the Colossians to do,

“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”
(Colossians 3:1-5)

These indicative statements describe a believer's position in Christ. We are dead, and have been raised with Christ into Heaven. So we should be laying aside our old self, and putting on a new self; which means we are to set our hearts and minds upon that which is above, in Heaven, because the things of the world, cannot exist in Heaven. So we must act in accordance as one who exists in Heaven with Christ Jesus. We can rejoice, Hallelujah. We are free, free at last, because we are born again in Christ, and in Christ there is nothing that can stop us, as long as we are doing the will of our Father in Heaven; not giving heed

⁸ Hebrews 12:2

to the desires of the flesh that the world has to offer. If we have mustard seed faith in Christ, then temptation cannot win over in our lives.

We learn that when we were baptized we put on Christ,⁹ thus He is revealed in us,¹⁰ and He lives in us,¹¹ because He is formed in us.¹² In principle, this means that we know Christ, and that knowledge allows us to live by Him in our spirit. If so, then we should be able to defeat the temptations which affect the flesh; if ONLY, we had the faith of that tiny little mustard seed. This by the way, is how we know we are indwelt with the Holy Spirit, and that we are allowing Him to have total control over our lives.

*"At that day you will know that I am in My
Father, and you in Me, and I in you."
(John 14:20)*

This verse really encourages me, because it tells me that one day we will have full understanding of the connection we have with our FATHER in Heaven; and that's the connection that our Lord Jesus Christ, has established for us when He bridged the gap between GOD and man. As we walk with our Lord, the Holy Spirit impresses this truth upon us. That's why we often instinctively cry out in our spirit, "ABBA, FATHER", especially during our most difficult moments.

So one must be circumspect in one's walk with Christ. Thus the popular saying by some, "What Would Jesus Do?" (WWJD). After all, if sin did not exist then we would not act in an unrighteous way, but instead we would walk as Jesus did. If we have the faith of that mustard seed, then the strength Jesus possessed, which enabled Him to withstand sin, would be ours also. Always remember that whenever you struggle with sin, the power that raised Christ from the dead is available to you and me every day. So Christian, I tell you to boldly stand firm against sin through the power of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

⁹ Galatians 3:27

¹⁰ Galatians 1:16

¹¹ Galatians 1:20

¹² Galatians 4:19

This is why He sent the Helper, the Holy Spirit to us. The Helper, empowers us to live in the light of the Gospel, while moving us to do the will of the Father.¹³ Jesus knew that once He left this world we would be weak and forgetful; thus the Holy Spirit reminds us of things we learned from the One who became the propitiation for our sins, and not just ours, but for the whole world.¹⁴ As long as we practice the faith of a mustard seed, then we know we are in the presence of the Living GOD, where no sin can exist.

Now, I realize we are still living inside a body that has been sinful since conception,¹⁵ which means we will inevitably sin, because the flesh is weak, and the temptations we face are severe at times. However, we know that He Who began a good work in us will continue doing so until the day Jesus Christ returns.¹⁶ On that day we will become complete, but we can also be assured that the more we strive to walk circumspectly, the easier it will be to deny the unholy desires of our flesh.

Paul tells us that we are all born under the dominion of sin,¹⁷ and that we all have an innate desire to rebel against authority in general. So to rebel against our Creator is normal for unbelievers. Yet we are born again in Christ Jesus, so instead of an attitude that drove us to be in control, which only led us to be controlled by our desires of the flesh, we have surrendered that control to Christ Jesus. We have in essence become willing bond servants¹⁸ to HIM instead of sin. We need to remember that HE Who is in us is greater than he, the tempter,¹⁹ who is in the world.

As a child of Christ, we can defeat sin, sickness, death, and even perform miracles just as Jesus did. Yes, miracles can abound if we just

¹³ Acts 16:6

¹⁴ 1 John 2:2

¹⁵ Psalm 51:5

¹⁶ Philippians 1:6

¹⁷ Romans 5:17

¹⁸ Exodus 21:1-6

¹⁹ 1 Thessalonians 3:5

have the faith of a mustard seed, because nothing is beyond our ability as long as we have faith. What I state is not an exaggeration, nor is it unBiblical; remember, after Jesus was arrested, tried, scourged, and crucified they all abandoned HIM. They had no faith, and feared for their life, then the miracle of HIS resurrection restored their faith, which became stronger than ever. With that mustard seed of faith they all began performing miracles. Had they paid attention they never would have fallen away, because Jesus told them this very truth,

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it”

(John 14:12-14)

Now I am not a charismatic person who claims I can do miracles. So far I have never performed even the most minute miracle. Yet I also believe it's because of my own weak faith. Yes, I am readily admitting to you that my disbelief is stronger than my faith, and this is why I am constantly doing as the disciples did²⁰ by asking Jesus Christ to increase my faith so that I can do as He told me I could. Sadly, I'm not the only one with weak faith, because as I look at the state of Christ' church today, I would say none of us have the faith of that little seed. This is why we all struggle with sin, and suffer illnesses while watching our loved ones suffer. All because none of us have the faith to even defeat the sins of the flesh and the lies of the evil one. We all struggle with different problems, and at different levels, but we all do struggle with sin.

I also don't claim we can stop sinning, but when I look around at my brothers and sisters in Christ, I see a lot of them struggling because they prefer the joys the world offers them more than they enjoy the simple pleasure of being with other brothers and sisters in fellowship and Bible

²⁰ Luke 17:5

study. Mind you, one day this world will end one day for us all, some sooner, some later, and many of us on the day Christ returns. In the meantime we must be about our Father's business, and if we do HIS will, then one day we will be granted rewards of crowns, of which we will cast before our LORD's throne. I am reminded of David dancing in the street as the tabernacle was brought into Jerusalem. Who knows, maybe we will be dancing like David, only before our LORD as we approach His throne to worship Him while casting our crowns at HIS feet. I can only imagine.

"The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying; Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

(Revelations 4:10-11)

Although the Scriptures do not state it specifically, I can see us being so overwhelmed by His sacrifice, which saved us from eternal damnation, that we will join the elders in throwing our crowns at His feet also. Regardless of what we endured on earth, a priceless crown will seem a paltry offering, but it will be the best gift we can give Him.

To help you defeat the temptations of the evil one's constant attacks, I cannot stress the importance of keeping yourself immersed in the Word. Reading your Bible daily will ensure that GOD's advice will be at the forefront of your mind so that the powers of this world cannot, and will not take you from Him who died for you. I also offer this simple short verse for you to remember and repeat when you ask Jesus for strength to withstand the temptation of sin.

"I am dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

(Romans 6:11)

Regardless of how small or big that temptation is, repeat and meditate upon it, because from the beginning of time sin has been crouching at the door with a desire to sift us like wheat.

“So the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.”

(Genesis 4:6-7)

Even when Jesus was with the disciples, Satan wanted to sift the disciples,

“And the Lord said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat.”

(Luke 22:31)

Like HE did for Peter, and Jesus is true and faithful to HIS word, that HE will protect us,

“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”

(1 John 4:4)

Throughout this book, I offer advice on how to overcome the struggles we all face in our walk with Christ in this world. I also offer some apologetical commentaries I have written through the years to help you understand some of the difficult questions you may have as you read the Scriptures, and how to know that the lies of the world are just that, lies from the evil one. Included are some devotional writings scattered about for you to ponder and meditate upon. Overall, It’s my prayer that you will find the commentaries, and devotionals helpful as you attempt to walk circumspectly in this world, as if you are already in heaven.

I pray those who have ears to hear, will hear His voice and call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Chapter 3

Judging Yourself Before You Judge Others

So You Will Not Be Judged

As a Christian, we still must live in this fallen world until Jesus brings us home, and as such we will fail in our walk many times. Praise be to GOD that HIS Son died for our sins, so that we can go to Him when we find ourselves walking in the flesh instead of in HIS spirit. One of the many ways Christians find themselves walking in the flesh is when we unrighteously judge others. Christians are confronted with many evil things in this world that we know are just wrong on so many levels, and it's these moments that could inevitably lead us to unrighteously judge the actions of others.

To help understand how we, as Christians should judge, I will tackle three aspects of judging. One where we should be judging ourselves, one where many misunderstand the quote from Jesus about judging others, and one where it is justified for believers to judge unbelievers. The first two tie into the same subject, while the third is misunderstood by both believers and unbelievers alike.

Keep in mind, I speak for how Christians should judge, not how unbelievers should. Until one becomes a believer, most of what unbelievers do or the way they act should be of little concern to us, because an unbeliever's soul is already in jeopardy of eternal damnation. In the last sentence I used the word “most”, because there are aspects of judging unbelievers which are justifiable. However, when it comes to those in the world we should be more concerned about their salvation, than we are about their lifestyles.

As you read this chapter, keep in mind these following verses from the Scriptures. They will help you better understand the way we are called to walk circumspectly in a world where we are continually

forced to judge righteously; while being mindful that we will be judged by the same standard we judge others.

“Let us search out and examine our ways, And turn back to the LORD;”

(Lamentations 3:40)

“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.”

(2 Corinthians 13:5)

“Judge not, that you be not judged.

“For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”

(Matthew 7:1)

"For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside GOD judges.

(1 Corinthians 5:12-13)

Have you ever been sitting in the house reading a book or watching television, when out of the corner of your eye you spot something moving along the corner of the wall? Or maybe you're lying in bed and you hear some scraping, scratching, and the pitter patter of teeny-tiny feet in the attic? Well when you have a mouse on the loose around the house, you know it's time to set a trap or two.

Now, anyone who has trapped a mouse has their own idea of what the perfect bait is to lure that mouse into the trap. Cheese, peanut butter, or maybe a piece of sweet chocolate. The idea is to use something that will make a mouse drop its guard so that it will be lured into eating the food, and soon the annoying pitter patter will end and you can sleep. Humans are no different than mice, and Satan is no different than a person trying to trap a mouse. The only difference is the bait. The difference is a mouse has no soul, so they only lose their life, but if a

human takes the bait Satan offers, their soul could be condemned to hell for eternity; where the worm never dies and the fire is never quenched.²¹

Consider the fact that every choice we make in life can be seen by the GOD, who will judge us for all our outwardly and inwardly actions. So even if we just make a sinful choice in our heart by desiring it to happen, but never follow up on it, we are still guilty of the transgression. We are told by Christ;

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery, But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.’”

(Matthew 5:28)

The point being, the LORD knows everything. Knowing that, we need to keep in mind that every step we take, and every thought we think could be a step into a trap set by Satan to lure us into spiritual destruction. Woe is us, because who does not have wayward thoughts that are bad? Well this is why we are to judge ourselves in every step we take, and with every thought we think.

In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul implores us to always be prepared by having the full armor of GOD on,²² Among the items of the armor are the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. The helmet protects the mind of a Christian like a battle helmet protects the head of a warrior. While the sword is the Word of GOD, which we should be immersed in so that the helmet will have the power needed to protect our mind from becoming a playground of Satan’s evil desires.

When Satan tempted Jesus in the desert, he used Scripture,²³ but the true knowledge of the Scripture is what Jesus used against Satan to defeat him. We too, should be as Jesus was, by wearing the helmet, and being prepared with the Sword of the Spirit. It is in this manner that you

²¹ Isaiah 66:24; Mark 9:44

²² Ephesians 6:10-17

²³ Matthew 4:1-3

will be judging yourself, because when Satan tries to lure you into sin with a seed of temptation, you will have the knowledge of Scripture to respond to him as did Jesus, and this knowledge will protect you from falling for Satan's trap. You cannot lose, if you know and trust GOD's Word.

After twisting the Scripture to tempt Jesus into turning rocks into stone for food, Satan then takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple, and tells HIM,

*"If You are the Son of GOD, throw Yourself down.
For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge
over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you
up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"*

(Psalm 91:11-12)

Yet Jesus was ready for Satan, because HE used the truth by quoting Scripture from Deuteronomy.

"It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your GOD.'"
(Matthew 4:7)

GOD is the holy King of the heavens and of the physical universe, so He doesn't have to prove anything to anybody. So we should never ever tempt GOD. In Hebrews about the power of the Sword of the Spirit.

*"For the word of GOD is living and powerful, and
sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the
division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and
is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."*

(Hebrews 4:12)

Ignore this advice at your own peril, because only the ungodly will be standing in judgment before the Father. To avoid that judgment, you must remember to always be judging yourself. So that you will know, that you know you will be in the congregation of the righteous.

I seriously advise you to consider what your future destination will be, because if you don't judge yourself then be prepared to face GOD on judgment day. We are told that the unGODly shall stand in judgment, while those who choose wisely will stand in the congregation of the righteous and thus gain eternal life.

Which brings me to the lesson Jesus gave His disciples about judging others. See, everything I wrote above truly does tie into a misunderstanding that many have over what Jesus said;

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”

(Matthew 7:1-2)

It needs to be pointed out that in Matthew, Jesus was speaking specifically about those who publicly proclaimed to be children of the One true living GOD and Creator of the heavens and earth, who were the Jewish Religious leaders. Jesus was using them as an example of how His followers should not be. We are not to judge others hypocritically as the Pharisees and Sadducees did. That's why Jesus called them white washed tombs full of dead bones. In many ways, the Religious leaders were more guilty of what they accused others of doing, than those they accused. Thus Jesus tells His followers to judge righteously.

Also, His example of judging the religious leaders shows us who we can judge and how we should judge, if we feel the need to do so. Just as Jesus was judging Jews who claimed to be children of the true GOD, we are speaking of Christians judging others who claim to be followers of Christ. At the time Jesus was walking with the disciples, He did not judge the gentiles, he only judged those who were Jews; because they were chosen specifically by GOD to be HIS children and in Jesus, their time of judgment had come.

“For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.”
(Deuteronomy 7:6)

If we do judge, we should only do so against other professing Christians, not against non believers outside the covenant of Christ. This also means when Christians judge other Christians, it should only be done in a righteous way. Not like the Jewish Religious leaders did, who judged hypocritically to unrighteously rule over GOD's people. Since we are children of GOD through adoption papers signed by the blood of Christ, we must do as He tells us, and Jesus tells us to judge other believers righteously.

So how do we as followers of Jesus judge righteously? We start by judging ourselves, lest we find ourselves being judged with the ungodly, and we do so by wearing the helmet of salvation and bearing the Sword of the Spirit. We need to keep ourselves immersed in the Word, so that we will continually be reminded of what the Word says when we step into the flesh. When we stumble and fall, we should catch ourselves by remembering that we are emissaries of Christ in a dark world. So by continually judging our own actions we will then be in a position to judge others righteously. If we then see a brother or sister in Christ, falling away by sinning, then we have an obligation to judge them.

While Paul told the Corinthians they should judge other Christians, he also told them not to judge those of the world, in his 2nd letter to them could not have been more clear on the subject:

“I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a

drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside GOD judges.”

(1 Corinthians 5:9-13)

Jesus tells us in John's Gospel to judge righteously;

*“Do not judge according to appearance,
but judge with righteous judgment.”*

(John 7:24)

Clearly, Jesus expects us to judge, but He tells us to do so correctly by using proper standards. Again, I repeat myself, but this is an important lesson, you should first judge yourself to be sure you are not bringing condemnation upon yourself in the way you judge others. If you, as a Christian, must approach another Christian who has stumbled, you should first go to GOD and ask HIM to search your heart, so that you can see if there is anything you may have done that would make your rebuking, of a brother or sister, hypocritical.

*“Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and
know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way
in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.”*

(Psalms 139:23-24)

Finally, the third part of this lesson involves judging non-believers. We live in a world where evil exists, and we all live in a country that is governed by man's laws. As citizens of the country we live in, oftentimes we will see the need to be critical of those in the world. Societies do not work without laws, and as such, we are given a green light to judge others who are not believers, but not for their failure to follow GOD's laws. GOD gives us the right to legally judge unbelievers, if they transgress the laws of man which we all, as a united citizenry, agreed upon via the government that we all live under in the world.

Thus, in accordance with the laws put in place by the man-made governments, GOD gives us the right, and we have an obligation, to judge those who break the legal and moral laws of the country; as long as said law does not violate GOD's precepts. An example would be, when someone is stealing from another person, that would be a violation of man's law, and by GOD's standard we have an obligation to insure justice is served. However, if man's law says it is illegal to share the Gospel with strangers, we have an obligation by GOD to ignore that law. It must be stated that most countries do allow citizens to challenge their lawmakers, law breakers, and those who falsely accuse us of breaking laws. So while we should not judge those of the world by Christians doctrinal standards, we can judge those in violation of worldly legal standards; again, remember not to do so hypocritically.

I pray those who have ears to hear, will hear His voice and call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

Being A Watchman For Christ

Up until the 19th century, cities often stationed watchmen on high walls or in watchtowers to keep guard. Their job was to keep an eye out for the enemy, by watching out over the horizon from their vantage point. They were the ones who warned the people of any apparent dangers. If they saw any sign of an attack, they would alert the people with a trumpet blast, or ringing a bell. However, if they failed to properly warn the people, by falling asleep or just being unaware, then the city could be attacked without the citizens being prepared to defend themselves. If they were ever caught sleeping on the job, their punishment was death. You're probably wondering why this matters to Christians. Well, there is an Old Testament warning from GOD to Ezekiel, that should also be taken as a serious warning to all Christians.²⁴

“If the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.”
(Ezekiel 33:6)

The world we live in today is similar to that of the time after Constantine legalized Christianity. Constantine had defeated his enemies, and reigned as the sole Emperor of Rome. His first order of business was to legalize Christianity. Eventually, Christianity became the preferred religion of the Roman Empire, and becoming a Christian was the thing to do as many began identifying themselves as Christian. This made it difficult to distinguish between who was and who was not a true Christian, with the new converts following questionable doctrines

²⁴ The full warning can be found in Ezekiel 33:1-20

taught by false teachers of the Gospel. Well it seems like Christ's church is in the same predicament today. We again cannot be assured that our friends and relatives are receiving the truth, or poison. Paul warned of times like this in his letter to the Colossians;

“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the GODhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”
(Colosians 2:8-10)

How many times have you looked out your window, or have been out in front of your house and witnessed a couple of Mormons, or Jehovah Witness's walking around knocking on doors in your neighborhood to spread false teachings of the Gospel? What do you do? Do you just ignore it, because after all, it's none of your business what they are peddling? Now what if they were instead selling drugs, would you still ignore them? After all, it's none of your business. Right? Wrong! Just as it's your responsibility to protect your neighborhood from drug dealers, it's your Christian responsibility to stop false Biblical doctrine from being shared with your family, friends, and neighbors.

Dear brothers and sisters we are charged, by no less than Christ himself, to defend the faith and protect others from being taught false doctrines. Even if it means we will be persecuted for doing so; after all, why would you hire a security guard if you did not expect him to go into battle for your safety? Can you ever envision Peter, John, or Paul walking by and ignoring a gnostic heretic who may be sharing a falsehood about Christ? Just read Paul's letters and you will know that Paul took a hardline against false teachers of the Word. Read what he said about those who claimed the Galatians needed to be circumcised.

“And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has

ceased. I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off! For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

(Galatians 5:11-13)

Since Christ died, billions of Christians have faced beatings, imprisonment, and death by extreme measures, for sharing and defending the Gospel message. Every disciple of Christ, other than John, died for defending the Gospel. Sadly, in today's world I see many Christians constantly turning a blind eye, while walking away as false teachers to lead their friends and relatives astray with lies that will lead them to hell and eternal damnation. Jesus tells us to take up our cross and follow HIM, but also HE tells us we will be hated for His namesake. Mind you, that is not a command to shirk our responsibility so we will not be persecuted. Five times Jesus tells us to take up that cross, and seven times HE tells us we will be persecuted for doing so.

"And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me."

(Matthew 10:38)

"Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

(Matthew 16:24)

"When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

(Mark 8:34)

"Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me."

(Mark 10:21)

“Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”

(Luke 9:23)

“And you will be hated by all for My name's sake.

But he who endures to the end will be saved.”

(Matthew 10:22)

“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake.”

(Matthew 24:9)

“And you will be hated by all for My name's sake.

But he who endures to the end shall be saved.”

(Mark 13:13)

“But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake.”

(Luke 21:12)

“And you will be hated by all for My name's sake.”

(Luke 21:17)

“But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.”

(John 15:21)

“For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.”

(Acts 9:16)

Which brings me back to the Old Testament lesson we Christians need to be aware of. It begins with a parable from GOD, then continues with a message to the prophet Ezekiel as to what the parable means. It gets right to the heart of my lesson about being a Watchman for Christ.

“Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'Son of man, speak to the children of your people, and say to them: 'When I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from their territory and make him their watchman, when he sees the sword coming upon the land, if he blows the trumpet and warns the people, then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, but did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But he who takes warning will save his life. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.'”

(Ezekiel 33:1-6)

In the parable above, GOD tells Isaiah how a watchman should do his job, and then goes on to tell him what the penalty is for not doing his job correctly. In this next verse, GOD tells Ezekial that he is being appointed as a watchman.

“So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me.”

(Ezekiel 33:7)

So GOD is telling Ezekiel that he is responsible for warning the people of what GOD wants them to know. If Ezekiel failed to share the message, then GOD tells him that he would be just as guilty of the sins committed as the ones who sinned, since he failed to warn them of GOD's intentions. This is a lesson for Christians also, because we are now Christ's watchmen. It is our responsibility to warn the people of danger, because we are GOD's chosen and we have all been given the same command by our Lord Jesus Christ. He specifically tells us to

share the Gospel and teach the truth. It's called the "Great Commission,"

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the
Son and of the Holy Spirit, "teaching them to
observe all things that I have commanded you; and
lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

(Matthew 28:19-20)

The warning is based upon the very fact that we are all sinners, and thus in danger of eternal damnation. It is our job as Christians to share the truth that sin will lead them to eternal separation from GOD where the worm never dies and the fire is never quenched.²⁵ It's every Christians obligation to share with the lost the only way they can avoid hell, and that's by repenting of their sins and giving their life to Christ. If we, as His watchman, fail to share the Gospel with people we meet, and they end up in hell from their sins, then we share the responsibility for them rejecting Christ. Just as the watchman was responsible for the city being attacked and destroyed, so too are we responsible if we fail to follow Christ' command of the Great Commission.

If you were on a boat, and you knew it was sinking, wouldn't you do all you can to save the other passengers by offering life jackets, or a place in a smaller boat so they would not drown? If you see a car careening off the road onto a sidewalk towards a bunch of unaware pedestrians, wouldn't you do your best to warn them of the car coming their way? You cannot assume they will be aware of the danger that lies ahead.

Well, we also cannot assume that someone else will come by and share the Gospel with people we meet. What if you meet a person in the park while walking your dog. You strike up a conversation about the dogs, yet you never bring up the Gospel. What if that person never heard of Jesus, or never knew about the true story about Him? Now

²⁵ Isaiah 66:24; Mark 9:46

imagine that person is walking home from the park, and while crossing the street a drunk driver runs a red light and kills him. A few moments later you're driving home and you see the person you talked to a few moments earlier lying on the ground dead. You may not know they didn't know Jesus, but GOD does. That's why HE sent you to the park that day, at that time. You may have been that person's last chance to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Like it or not, you, being the watchman, failed to warn him of the danger of sin and the assurance he could have had. Thus you are partly responsible for him spending eternity in hell. GOD put you in the park with him, because GOD knew his time was short, and you failed at your mission.

OH I know this is an extreme situation, in that we cannot know if GOD would do that. However, we cannot claim to understand the mind of GOD, so we need not tempt HIM by ignoring our responsibility. I offer this plausible scenario for you to consider the full ramifications of failing to do your number one job as a Child of Christ, evangelizing with strangers while the opportunity presents itself. Paul tells us in his epistle to the Romans how GOD uses us to spread the Gospel. I repeat myself, it is our number one job as a follower of Christ. Nothing comes before it, and to ignore it is to be a failure as a watchman.

“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!”

(Romans 10:14-15)

An incident in Genesis should make all Christians understand the seriousness of taking the lesson of the Watchman to heart. It comes from the response Cain gave to GOD after he killed his brother Able. when asked,

“Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?”
(Genesis 4:9)

While Cain's response revealed the true nature of his heart which lacked all feeling or love towards the brother he just murdered, there is a grain of truth in his brazen lie. No one is the absolute “keeper” of others, in that we are not responsible for everyone’s safety when we are not in their presence. However, every man is their brother’s keeper, and as a child of GOD we are responsible for the way we treat other creatures of GOD, both human and animal. As a Christian, we are even more responsible for being the keepers of our brothers and sisters in Christ. All Christians are of the same body of Christ, and as thus we are called to keep, not just a physical watch over them, but especially a spiritual watch over them.

I offer this analogy, similar to the one Paul shared with the Corinthians, about the similarity between a human body as the body of Christ’ church.²⁶ If someone throws a ball at your head, your whole body will join together to save the head from being harmed. Maybe the neck will cause your head to tilt, or the arm will raise the hand to bat away the ball. In a similar way, one brother or sister in Christ should be a watchman for other brothers or sisters in the body of Christ, so they will not be harmed either physically or spiritually.

This includes protecting other Christians from spiritual heresy, especially those who are new to the faith. So if you see Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, or any other cult members walking around your neighborhood selling spiritual poison, you need to step up. A watchman must be alert at all times, because you never know when the enemy will attack those around you.

I pray those who have ears to hear, will hear His voice and call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 12:20-28

Let Go Of The Anger

Many years ago when I was still living for the joys of the world, I remember being so angry over something that I slammed my fist onto the dash of my car. To this day I cannot remember why I was angry, but everytime my wrist hurts I remember the anger. That's because when I hit the dash with my fist, I inadvertently hit a small strip of trim made from chrome with my wrist bone. It hurt so bad that I could barely use my hand for a week. As I get older and older, I'm reminded of that foolish moment whenever it gets cold, or when I lift heavy objects. Add in the arthritis that has set in and, I can tell you first hand that anger has done more harm to me than I ever would have realized.

It's been said that anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured onto. In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul tells us:

“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.”

(Ephesians 4:31)

For many years I walked with anger in my heart for those who did me wrong or hurt my loved ones. Like my wrist, my anger and rage has always done more harm to myself than it has to the person the anger was targeted at. As I said, to this day I cannot remember why I was so angry that I felt the need to slam my fist onto the dash of my car. The thing that made me angry is forgotten, while I am reminded daily of the destruction to my own vessel that anger caused. I chose to sin and be angry, rather than be obedient and let go of that anger.

In the past, I even got angry over situations where an inanimate object might fall and break. It wasn't until I submitted myself to Christ, and allowed Him to work on my angry heart that I was able to let go of

that anger. All it took was for me to submit to GOD's will in my life, and in time my anger subsided. I began to see things through GOD's perspective instead of my own, I also began realizing how often HE offered me grace for my disobedience instead of reacting to me in anger as I did to the world.

We need to understand The LORD our GOD gave us free will, which is the ability to choose which road to take in our daily journey. We can either choose to walk in peace with The LORD, or we can choose to walk in anger with the enemy. One is grace the other is vengeance, one is obedience the other is sin. Through the sacrifice of HIS SON, I have salvation, but with that salvation comes the duty to love, not hate. He loves me, and his grace is sufficient for me, so who am I to do any less for others?

I'm not perfect by any means, and I still fail at times to control my anger at things and people. However, I try my best to love and bless those who do me wrong. When I'm successful at holding back my anger, I know that I will be heaping coals of fire upon their heads instead of burning myself with my anger.

“If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; For so you will heap coals of fire on his head, And the Lord will reward you.”

(Proverbs 25:21-22)

Forgiving those who do me wrong is like pulling a power play on my heart. I give it to GOD, and He does what He always does, while revealing things I have yet to deal with in my own life that could anger others. Sometimes they're things I have hidden for years, even from myself. Being angry over things from many years ago will only negatively affect your future, and those around you.

“If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all people. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of GOD, for it is written: “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.”

(Romans 12:18-19)

Many fail to realize that Moses did not enter the promised land because of anger. After wandering with a bunch of misfits he freed from Egypt, he then had to put up with their constant complaints and ungratefulness for setting them free from bondage. You may recall, the time GOD told Moses to strike the rock so the people could have water at Mt Horeb.

*“Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb;
and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it,
that the people may drink.”*

(Exodus 17:6)

Well fast forward 40 years, and again they are complaining about water. This time GOD told Moses to just speak to the rock. Instead, in his anger Moses chastised the people and then angrily struck the rock twice. GOD got so upset with Moses that HE told him because of what he did he would die before they entered the promised land.

*“And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together
before the rock; and he said to them, “Hear now, you rebels!
Must we bring water for you out of this rock?” Then Moses
lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and
water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their
animals drank. Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron,
“Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes
of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this
assembly into the land which I have given them.”*

(Numbers 20:10-12)

It's not that Moses died and went to hell. However, his anger caused him to miss out on the blessing GOD had in store for him in this world. If anyone deserved to enter the promised land, GOD was going to give the Israelites, it was Moses. If for no other reason, than because he put up with an ungrateful sorry bunch of losers for the last 40 years of his life.

What we need to understand is that our anger at those who hate and ridicule and persecute us, could keep us from receiving the blessings GOD wants us to enjoy here in this world. We are supposed to be an example of a loving and forgiving GOD. Paul pretty much tells us that if we want to get upset with anyone, we should get upset with our fellow Christians, not those who are in the world,

"I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person."

(1 Corinthians 5:9-11)

GOD tells us this, because the world is lost, those who are lost do as the lost do. You cannot avoid them, because how can you evangelize to them if you are not in contact with them. It does not mean you should hang out in bars or join them in their sin, but you need to be around a lost person to have a chance to save them. We cannot expect the lost to stumble into a Church and ask to be saved. In a blue Moon this could happen, but we need to be amongst the lost to reach them.

Be mad at the world, not the sinners in the world. Be angry, but do not sin. Hate evil, but not those practicing it. Do as Jesus did. Jesus scolded the religious leaders of the time, and avoided hanging out with them. Yet, he did not scold the sinners that he hung out with.

A perfect example of what I mean is the time Jesus went through Jericho and stayed at the house of Zacchaeus, the tax collector. Back in Jesus day, tax collectors were nothing more than scam artists legally fleecing money from the citizens. They worked for the Roman Empire to collect the taxes from the people. The thing is, they could collect as much money as they wanted as long as the Romans got what they demanded? What made many of them so bad, was the Romans used the

local Jews to collect taxes for them. So here you have a Jewish man collecting taxes for Caesar, who was legally stealing from his fellow Jews. Don't be too shocked though, because Matthew, the disciple who wrote the Gospel, was also a tax collector.

“Then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.” So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, “He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.” Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.” And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

(Luke 19:1-10)

Another way to keep from allowing your flesh to get upset, is to stop worrying about things you have no control over, by remembering to always give things to Jesus. By doing so you are showing the faith you have in HIM to take care of things. So fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith,²⁷ who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of GOD.

Always remember that you, as a child of Christ, are to be His example to those lost in the world. We do this in many ways, one of

²⁷ Hebrews 12:2 NASB

them is by controlling our anger so we can be an example of the grace GOD has shown us in our lives. We, who were once sinners ourselves, should now show the love to those still lost just as Christ showed us. Give to Christ everything this world throws at you by letting go of the anger Christian, and start enjoying the blessings GOD has in store for you.

I pray those who have ears to hear, will hear His voice and call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

Chapter 6

Armed And Ready For Battle

and

A Psalm of Thanks

An often repeated strategy I mention for our battles against sin, is to be armed and ready for battle. Soldiers do not put on war gear after the battle starts, they are armed and ready to fight before they enter the battle. Paul tells us that our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places. So we are to take up the whole armor of GOD, for our battle against the evil one.

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”
(Ephesians 6:10-13)

I wrote the Psalm below, in my journal back in 2008. It was a time when I was in a spiritual struggle with evil. I remembered how easily I had succumbed to Satan’s desires before I became a Christian, but I knew Satan would not stop trying to win me back from Christ. I did eventually win the battle, but only because I fought while wearing the full armor of GOD. I wrote the following Psalm as a thank you prayer to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The ONE who gave me the tools I needed to win the battle. In our struggle to walk circumspectly in the world, we must remember to keep our eyes on ONE who died for us. By doing so we are assured to win the spiritual battle we are in.

Armed And Ready To Battle

*Before I found Christ, my soul was lost in sin,
Desires of my flesh were eating me from within,
The evil one inside me had complete control
He had even turned my soul into an empty black hole.*

*Then Jesus came to my rescue and replenished my empty soul,
Satan attacks do continue, and an unguarded soul is his goal.
The wiles of the devil are the ways I used to sin,
So he brings up my past to find a way in.*

*Sometimes his attacks are sudden and swift,
Hoping to entice me with an evil little gift.
There are also those times when he is patient and slow,
Lurking at my door to sow a seed that will grow.*

*Like darkness that overcomes me when I close my eyes,
His evil way is dark and he is full of many lies.
He uses old forgotten memories to make me desire,
A life that had me heading to destruction and fire.
Using visions and desires to make me re-act,
He wants me to be dizzy so I'll stumble and fall back.*

*While depending on my own strength ensures I'll lose my soul,
Instead I'll trust another who has paid my bill in full.
With help from the Holy One I will continue to fight on,
Knowing that one day all temptation will be gone.
For this continuing spiritual battle I find myself in,
It's the full armor of God that assures I will win.
Thanks You Jesus, Amen*

I pray those who have ears to hear, will hear His voice and call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

Why Worry Christian?

It has been said that while money is the biggest stumbling block to the rich, worry is the biggest stumbling block to the poor. However, I have read about many rich people worrying about their money and I have known many poor people who have stumbled with what little money they had.

We live in the most powerfully affluent society the world has ever seen, not since Solomon ruled Israel has a country been so affluent as America is today. Even the poor among us are wealthy when compared to the poorest people in places like Bangladesh. When America was in a virtual lockdown due to the COVID virus in early 2020, the United States was still the country everyone wanted to come to for success and tranquility in their lives. The biggest proof is all the people from other countries who are still trying to come into this country which truly says something about the rest of the World.

Let's consider some of the items the so-called poor in America own. New cars, cell phones, computers, televisions, stereos, and they even have money in the bank. We also have the best health care system the world has ever seen. Even after Socialists have done all they could to destroy it in the name of equality, we still have the best healthcare on the planet. The average American lives longer than most others on the planet, and no one out does America in how we bury our dead.

Which brings me to today's topic about "Worry". With all our affluent living and all our stuff, Americans worry more about things in their life than everyone else on the planet. At the height of the COVID crisis, cardiovascular problems continued to be the biggest medical problem in the world. However, the number one reported medical problem is anxiety attacks, because we worry too much. I personally

believe that we Americans get so bored with our opulence that we end up worrying about things we imagine might go wrong.

We are so well off, that we literally create maladies where none exist just to feel special or to get sympathy. I typed the word, “worry”, into google search and came up with over 3 billion results dedicated to the discussion of anxieties and our daily worries. I found a couple of websites that asked people to email them about the things they worry about the most. There are so many things people worry about, that each site has different responses. This alone tells us how many people worry about things.

Here are a couple I jotted down:

- 1.) One person said they worry that the day they do not play the employee lottery, their number will win, then everyone will quit and they will be stuck doing all the work.
- 2.) Another one said they worry that their cat will lie on their face when they are sleeping and they will suffocate to death. Makes you wonder why they even have a cat if that's their fear.
- 3.) One woman wrote that she worries there might be spiders and other bugs in her bed, and while she is sleeping they will crawl all over her and get into my mouth, nose, and ears.
- 4.) My favorite is the lady who worries that one day they will stop making chocolate and that she will starve to death.
- 5.) One worry that was on a couple of the sites is how people worried about things that will never happen.

Wow, talk about living in fear by worrying. In his letter to the Philippians, the Apostle Paul tells us to,

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to GOD;”

(Philippians 4:6)

Now if there was ever a person who had a right to worry, it would have been Job.²⁸ Consider the troubles he found himself faced with one day when our Lord bragged to Satan about His servant. One day GOD asked Satan to consider His servant Job. GOD told Satan that there was none like him in all the earth; and that Job was a blameless and upright man, one who feared GOD and shunned evil. Satan challenged GOD by asking HIM to remove the hedge of protection HE had around Job, and if HE did, Job would curse HIM. Well we all know that GOD agreed. Eventually HE even allowed Satan to afflict Job physically to prove Job would not curse GOD.

Eventually Job lost everything from five tragedies that struck almost simultaneously. First Sabeen raiders stole his oxen and donkeys, then fire killed his sheep and his herdsman. No sooner had the tragedy happened when Chaldean raiders stole his camels and killed his servants. As if things couldn't get any worse, a tragic calamity took the lives of his children when a strong wind collapsed the house where they were all gathered together. Yet Job never cursed GOD. Instead he praised HIM by saying,

*"Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked
shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has
taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord."*

(Job 1:21)

That's when GOD allowed Satan to attack Job physically with a terrible case of boils, possibly leprosy or elephantiasis. To make matters worse his loving wife tells him to curse GOD and die. Then his three so-called friends tell him to repent for sins that he knows he has not committed. Really makes you hope that GOD never brags about you to Satan, doesn't it? After all that, you would expect Job to at least start worrying, but what does he do instead? He calls himself accursed from birth, but never once blamed GOD. Nor did he ever worry about his

²⁸ Job chapters 1 & 2

future. Instead when you read the book of Job, you will find that he accepted his newfound lot in life.

Jesus tells us that it's a lack of faith to worry.²⁹ If we worry we are not trusting in GOD to care for us, thus we have no faith in HIM. When a mother holds a baby in her arms does that baby worry what will happen? No! A child eats something a parent says is ok to eat because the child has faith the parent would not lie. Apart from the exceptions to the rule, most parents love and would not purposely do harm to their child. Why do we think GOD would care any less? If GOD cares so much for plants that are here today and in the fire tomorrow, how much more does HE care for us. After all, we will not only judge the earth and the angels,³⁰ but we will also inherit HIS Kingdom?

Besides being a sin, worry is a total waste of time and energy. Worry can become a substitute for action, instead of acting upon our need we just sit and worry. We begin to think that nothing is worth living for so we stop living and curl up inside ourselves. Worry warps our perceptions of the world, we begin to think this moment in life is all that matters. That's when some people turn to drugs or alcohol. Still others end up committing suicide because everything feels utterly hopeless.

Worry kept the Israelites out of the Promised Land for forty years. We all know the story. Moses sent 10 spies to check out the Promised Land. Even though they return with ample evidence to prove GOD was telling them the truth. Only two of the ten spies, Caleb and Joshua, wanted to go and possess the land. However the people were afraid, they believed the report of the eight who worried they could not defeat the giants they saw in the land GOD promised them in Canaan.³¹

Other than Caleb and Joshua, GOD punished the whole generation for their lack of faith. Ultimately, the Israelites worried that their children would be victims of those who live in the land of Canaan. In the end it was their children who inherited the land while their parents,

²⁹ Matthew 16:25-34

³⁰ 1 Corinthians 6:3

³¹ Numbers 13:1-25

who were the generation of former slaves, were eventually buried in the desert. They died in their disbelief, while their children had enough faith to believe in GOD's promise.

It's calculated that over 50 million Americans suffer health problems directly or indirectly related to worrying. It never amazes me how many people stress over the littlest things that literally stops them from being productive and enjoying life. What follows is some of the problems medical experts say are directly related worrying:

- Loss of sleep³²
- Memory loss due to anxiety brought on by worrying³³
- Optometrist³⁴ studies prove that many vision problems are related to stress over worrying
- An AHA (American Heart Association) has concluded that worrying causes a person's heart to work harder, which puts extra stress on a person's cardiovascular system. This extra stress has shown to lead to strokes and heart attacks. Thus, stress from worrying was one of the top causes of heart attacks.³⁵

³² PsychCentral <https://psychcentral.com/anxiety/can-lack-of-sleep-cause-anxiety>

³³ Mayo Clinic

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/alzheimers-disease/in-depth/memory-loss/art-20046326#:~:text=Stress%2C%20anxiety%20or%20depression%20can,loss%20by%20interacting%20with%20medications.>

³⁴ Optometrist.org

<https://www.optometrists.org/general-practice-optometry/guide-to-binocular-visual-dysfunction/bvd-symptoms-and-treatment/bvd-can-cause-anxiety/>

&

Brisbane medical

<https://www.brisbanebulkbillingdoctor.com.au/news/does-anxiety-cause-blurred-vision/#:~:text=Finally%2C%20severe%20anxiety%20can%20make,which%20can%20lead%20to%20blindness.>

³⁵ Heart.org

<https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/stress-and-heart-health>

- The American Dental Association³⁶ has determined that worrying can restrict the flow of saliva in the mouth,³⁷ Keeping the body from neutralizing acids that eat away the enamel on your teeth, leading to tooth decay. Extreme tooth decay has been proven to lead to mental illness.³⁸
- A number of top universities around the world have done studies on the effect stress and worry has on a students grades.³⁹ The results were unanimous, the more a student worries the more their grades suffer.

So if you want to suffer from mental illness while being a sleepy, blind, forgetful, unhealthy person with bad teeth and bad grades in school, then just keep on worrying about things you truly have no control over. Or you could just give it to Jesus, because you are not putting faith in Jesus when you worry yourself into the hospital. Mind you, we all have a set time to die, so there is nothing we can do to extend the days of our lives. However, if you want to wallow away in the hospital for the last ten years or so of your life, then keep on worrying.

The German word for WORRY is, “Wurgen”, pronounced, “VERGEN”. It actually means “Strangle” or “Choke”. Jesus tells us the parable of the sower that the seed is like the word of GOD.

“When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside.”
(Matthew 13:19)

³⁶ ADA

<https://www.ada.org/about/press-releases/2021-archives/new-survey-finds-stress-related-dental-conditions-continue-to-increase>

³⁷ National Library of medicine

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5768958/>

³⁸ Cleveland Clinic

<https://health.clevelandclinic.org/link-between-dental-health-and-mental-health/>

³⁹ Boston University

<https://www.bu.edu/articles/2016/college-students-anxiety-and-depression/>

“And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.”

(Matthew 13:22)

Jesus said, "O YE OF LITTLE FAITH". He didn't say, "YE of NO Faith", but "YE of LITTLE Faith".⁴⁰ Remember, this is the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus is talking to, and about, Christians of Faith. Unlike non-believers, we Christians have faith in GOD as our FATHER, and Jesus as our Savior. So it's not IF we have faith, but how much faith we have. Jesus desires for all of us to enter into a deeper faith, the faith of a mustard seed. So the end result of worrying is to become a Christian of "Little Faith"? He tells us,

“for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.”

(Matthew 17:20)

We should not become Christians who are mastered by the circumstances around us. Instead we are called to master those circumstances by putting our faith in Him. Are you satisfied just to be out of Egypt, but stuck in the desert? Are you afraid to face the Canaanites and possess the Promised Land?

In the story about David and Goliath, we read that Goliath kept all of Israel at bay for 40 days, because none of the Israeli soldiers would step up and fight Goliath. They all worried he would win, and they would have to serve the Philistines. Then a young shepherd boy stepped forward, who wasn't worried in the least. He didn't fear whether or not he would lose. He had the faith of a mustard seed, because he had Faith in the ONE True GOD. We all know the story. David beat Goliath, cut

⁴⁰ Matthew 6:30

his head off with his own sword, and went on to become the King of Israel. All this, because he had faith. He did not worry.⁴¹

How about Elijah, who challenged 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah to a contest on Mount Carmel. Each side was to sacrifice a bull to their GOD without starting the fire. The first one to have their fire started would prove who was the real GOD. The prophets of Baal and Asherah danced and cried all day, cutting themselves and singing all kinds of chants. When the sun began to go down so did their faith in their god, they knew their god had failed them and it was Elijah's turn to call on his GOD. He told his young helpers to fill the trench with water so that the wood was floating. He stepped up and said a simple little prayer of faith.⁴²

When the chips are down and it all seems hopeless, just ask yourself, did Elijah worry? Did Job worry? How about Caleb and Joshua, did they worry? Do you think David worried? How about Daniel when he was put in the lion's den,⁴³ did he worry at all? How about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego,⁴⁴ did they worry? We know Paul never worried.⁴⁵ He was bold all the way to the executioners' chopping block.

Nope! None of these men worried about the darkness they entered, because they had faith in the light of Christ that was in them. We are told to let our light shine before men,⁴⁶ so they may see our good deeds and praise your FATHER in heaven. Jesus tells us that we are the light of the world,⁴⁷ but our light cannot shine forth if we are worried about the troubles of this world.

Many great men of the Bible refused the pressure to worship false GODs, instead, under the threat of death. Then they held true to their faith in the ONE True GOD. I love the response that Daniel's friends gave King Nebuchadnezzar when he threatened to toss them into the

⁴¹ 1 Samuel 17:1-58

⁴² 1 Kings 18:36-39

⁴³ Daniel 6:1-28

⁴⁴ Daniel 3:12-30

⁴⁵ 2 Timothy 4:6-8

⁴⁶ Matthew 5:16

⁴⁷ Matthew 5:14

fire for not bowing down to worship the golden statue erected of him. Will you stand up for Christ, or bow down and accept the evil which the world calls good? Daniel's friends didn't. They kept faith in GOD that HE would save them, or bring them home to HIM,

“Our GOD whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.”

(Daniel 3:17-18)

Many Christians through the years were like Paul and 11 of the 12 twelve disciples, who would die serving Christ; but not because they worried themselves to death. They all boldly faced death in various ways while proclaiming the kingdom of GOD is near. Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, they knew their GOD would save them, and if HE didn't, then they would leave this world to be HIM. So I say to you, my fellow Saint's of the GOD Most High, do not let the worries about tomorrow's problems rob you of today's joy. Be confident that He who has begun a good work in you,⁴⁸ will continue it until the day Shiloh comes.⁴⁹

I pray those who have ears to hear, will hear His voice and call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

⁴⁸ Philipians 1:6

⁴⁹ Genesis 49:10

Chapter 8

Lifted Up, Like A Snake The Desert

Allow me to introduce you to something very few Christians ever consider when they hear the phrase, “Lift Christ Up With Praise”. Quite often you will hear a Pastor say this as he instructs you to give glory to GOD through His Son. In order to truly put it into the perspective it deserves one needs to consider the most recognizable verse in the Bible, John 3:16. I would bet the vast majority of Christians have it locked into their memory bank. For millions like me, it’s the first verse we ever memorized in Sunday school as a child.

GOD’s gift to mankind was His only Son, Jesus. With the death of His Son on the cross, and HIS resurrection, all we need to do is confess Him as our Lord and Savior and our sins have been paid for in full. It’s Salvation in a nutshell. Praise GOD for simplicity! If there is any verse that says it all about GOD’s love for us, it’s this verse.

“For GOD so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

(John 3:16)

Interestingly, few can recite an important verse that comes earlier, 3:14, or maybe when they read 3:16 they mentally forget what 3:14 said. Which may be why so many are clueless as to what Jesus meant when HE said,

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up”

(John 3:14)

What Jesus said in this verse should take the reader back in time to Israel’s past, about 1450 years earlier Moses was leading the twelve tribes through the wilderness of Sin. It was a time when GOD was

showing them His power and love firsthand to the Israelites. In the Old Testament, we read how the children of Israel grew discouraged and spoke out against Moses and GOD, so GOD sent fiery snakes amongst the camps to punish the people.

“Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the souls of the people became very discouraged on the way. And the people spoke against GOD and against Moses: “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.” So the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.”

(Numbers 21:4-6)

The Israelites were so distraught over the affliction of the snakes that they approached Moses, confessing their sin while pleading with him to intercede on their behalf with GOD.

“Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people.”

(Numbers 21:7)

Now GOD did not remove the cause of their plight, instead HE instructed Moses to make a bronze serpent and erect it on a pole.

“Then the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.” So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.”

(Numbers 21:8-9)

Moses then placed the pole right in the middle of the camp. To properly understand the prophetically symbolic image GOD gave us, you would actually need to be an airplane flying overhead to truly appreciate it. GOD had Moses situate the Israelites in the camp in such a way that if you flew overhead, you would have literally seen a cross in the desert. Now right where the beams cross each other, is where the

tent of the tabernacle was set up, and that is where the pole with the bronze snake was raised. See the image in your head? Well meditate on that thought, because where the pole and the tabernacle is located, would be where Jesus' head will one day be as he is raised like a snake in the desert.

Moses told those who were bitten by the serpents to come to the pole, and gaze upon the image of which caused their pain, while the snakes GOD sent were still roaming around the camp biting the people. My mind has visions of these poisonous vipers possibly slithering on the ground near, or even around, the pole itself as the people come to look up at the affliction of their suffering. To look upon such an image erected on a pole must have been repulsive, and many would instinctively want to look away. However, if they wanted to live, they had to look to the bronze snake, or they would surely die. So too, if we want to live then we must look to Jesus or we will surely die.

Something else you must understand, when Moses lifted that bronze snake into the air, crucifixion would not be used until the Neo-Assyrians began practicing it near the end of their empire between 650-600 B.C.; yet, GOD was projecting how His Son would one day almost 800 years before it became a form of torture and death. This is the image which Paul brought to mind when he wrote to the Galatians,

“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us, for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”
(Galatians 3:13)

Being a learned scholar and former Pharisee, Paul was referring to the Law in Deuteronomy.

“If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the Lord your GOD is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of GOD.”
(Deuteronomy 21:22-23)

To see Christ lifted up and crucified, meant that He was considered accursed under the Law, as commanded by GOD Himself. I repeat, just

as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness for the Israelites to look upon and thus save themselves from death, so too did GOD lift up His Son on the cross so that we could look upon Him and be saved from the final death and eternal damnation.

Christ couldn't just die. He had to die the death of a sinner. Lowly, accursed, and lifted up on a pole. He was an image many found repulsive, just like that bronze snake Moses lifted up. Another prophet Isaiah, would also write about the death of our savior 600 years before he was lifted, by describing how the Messiah would one day be marred more than any man,

“Just as many were astonished at you, So His visage was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men; So His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men;”

(Isaiah 52:14)

He could have come down and said, “Not today!” But he stayed. He died a death of pain and shame for sins he never committed. Sacrificed from the beginning of time, for sins He saw us commit, yet turned His eyes every time we did. From the day Satan deceived Eve, and Adam chose her over GOD, evil has had a hold on this world. OH that evil was never unleashed, yet we cannot turn back the hands of time; and thus GOD had to make things right so we could again commune with HIM.

So, every time you are tempted by sin, try to remember how The King of Kings, The Lord of Lords, was so violently lifted up on a pole for you and me. Take a moment and look up at that Cross, and do not allow your head to turn away, or you very well may find yourself giving in to the temptation of sin. If you find yourself stumbling or committing an evil act, then take a moment and pray to the One who stayed upon that cross for you, so HE could give you strength and take away your shame of sin. His arms are outstretched and waiting for you, all you need to do is to look up willingly, and accept HIS Fathers’s gift to you. Then you can lift Him up with Praise, because HE was lifted up to become all the sins we are guilty of.

*“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might
become the righteousness of GOD in Him. “*

(2 Corinthians 5:21)

I pray that those who have ears to hear, will listen to His voice and
call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

Chapter 9

As An Ox Goes To The Slaughter

Proverb 7:22

Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, Or as a fool to the correction of the stocks,

Probably the greatest example of the consequences mentioned in Proverbs 7, is the way Delilah sold out Samson for some silver. Only the betrayal of Christ by Judas', will you find a greater example of betrayal. Many men through the ages have lost everything, because they cherished a moment over their future. I would lie if I said I never fell for such a woman, as many men have. Mine cost me my first marriage, and to this day I still regret it. I lost all I had, my wife, my children, my home, and my livelihood. Years later I still pay the price, because I lost millions of moments with my children.

I was quite young, and many said I was too young to get married in the first place. Great excuse, but it's just a cop-out. I never should have believed that forbidden passion was worth the chance I was taking. The moments I spent with the woman, whom herself was also married, were everything you read about in novels. Yet to this day I cannot tell you anything about her, other than she was beautiful. I thought she would be just another trophy in my past. The truth is, I was just another destroyed life in hers.

Even King David had a stolen moment of infidelity with a beautiful woman he saw bathing. She knew the King could see her bathing, because her home was below his palace where he was known to walk in the evening in the cool of the day. Oh GOD did forgive them both, as he forgave me. GOD eventually blessed the union of David and Bathsheba by using their descendants to bring us our Savior. However, their infidelity cost an innocent man his wife and life. Because of his moment of forbidden passion, turmoil never left King David' house. A problem that almost destroyed David's hold on the Kingdom.

GOD is a forgiving GOD, and in time my life did settle down and I am blessed to have a wife of 35 years whom I love and cherish. However, I lost the intimacy I had with my children who themselves also suffered from my infidelity in ways I can never foresee.

Beware, and do not give your time to another whom you are not betrothed to. Be you a man or a woman, you are putting the future of what you hold dear on the line like chips on a roulette table. Just as one spin of the wheel can take away that which you gamble with, so too can the life you know and cherish be lost. You may think you will get away with it, but GOD knows what you are doing, and eventually He will make you pay for your sin. It's His way of keeping you from heading to hell. He wants us all to live forever with Him, but unless He stops us from sinning, or punishes us when we do, we will never care to weigh the consequences. Wake up and learn, or one day you could be like Pharoah, who was so lost GOD gave him what he wanted, and it led to his ultimate destruction.

I pray that those who have ears to hear, will hear His voice and call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Why Does GOD Allow Christians to Suffer?

“Why didn’t GOD just create us so that we would never have to experience pain, suffering, or sadness?”

The best way to answer this question, is to start at the beginning where original sin began. Now the best description I have ever read that describes sin is, “anything that falls short of the perfection of a perfect GOD is sin.” When we refer to sin we also use the word evil, which is the opposite of what GOD embodies. Now we know that GOD has the power to make the world free of evil, yet to truly stop evil from ever happening is to deny one the free will to do as one desires. However, GOD wanted a creature that was as close to being like HIMSELF, without being HIM. Thus when HE made man, HE made man in HIS image with free will.

With this free will came the possibility that Adam and Eve might disobey GOD of their own volition, and partake of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. Thanks to some coaxing from Satan, Eve was deceived into consuming that fruit and offered some to Adam. Adam, choosing Eve over GOD, also ate of the fruit. Thus, the first two humans exercised their GOD given right of free will, and they chose unwisely.

Adam and Eve’s disobedience ushered into the universe pain, suffering, lust, greed, envy, wrath, pride, calamity, gluttony, laziness, death, and etc. etc. etc. Their desire for that which was forbidden put an end to a perfect creation, while creating a wall of separation between man and GOD. Instead of a perfect world where a perfect GOD could have a perfect fellowship with a perfect man, they chose the opposite. This rejection not only destroyed the perfect fellowship of man and GOD, it also destroyed the perfect balance of a perfect universe.

Like Adam, every human has been given the right to freely choose between right and wrong. While Adam did sin, he was not created with a will to sin. Yet, because he ate of the forbidden fruit, all men now have a sin nature handed down to them from Adam with a will and a desire to sin. Since that moment, all humans have a 50% chance that we will choose to do the wrong thing and thus we will inevitably suffer the consequences of our sins. OH, GOD could have made us perfect without the ability to sin, but then we would be nothing more than Chatty Cathy dolls repeating and doing whatever was programmed into us. You need to ask yourself, “Is that the kind of life you would wish to live?”

Well obviously, GOD did not want man to be a puppet. So the short answer as to why pain and suffering exists would be due to GOD granting man free will. Now this does not mean we can blame GOD for sin, because GOD does not tempt anyone.⁵⁰ There is no evil in GOD, and regardless of some heretical teachings floating around, GOD is NOT the author of evil. In the next chapter I will expound more on the topic of who the author of sin is.

So Adam and Eve sold us into the slavery of sin, thus all believers, and non-believers, wrestle with the daily struggle within us called original sin. This moral corruption we possess is a consequence of Adam's sin, and it resulted in a disposition manifesting itself into habitually sinful behavior. Paul eloquently explained this struggle in his letter to the Romans,

“For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.”

(Romans 7:15-20)

⁵⁰ James 1:13

I for one praise GOD daily for giving us a way out of our predicament. For HE sent HIS Son, Jesus Christ, Who lived a sinless life, to be crucified on the cross, die, and then resurrected back to life, so that if we believe in Him we can gain forgiveness and have eternal life. However, just because we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior does not mean we are immunized from the pain and suffering of this world. This is why so many Christians inevitably ask the question, “Why am I suffering GOD? Why do my loved ones suffer?” What if on the day we accepted Christ as our Lord and Savior, we were given GOD’s total and complete protection, so nothing bad ever happened to us again? Well, that’s exactly what Satan believed GOD did for Job.

“Does Job fear GOD for nothing? Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face.”

(Job 1:9-11)

Can you imagine what would happen if GOD put a hedge about us on every side? Those lost in the world would follow Satan’s lead by claiming;

“So what if you love your GOD. Anybody would love a GOD if He protected them the way He does you. I’m not impressed. Besides, your GOD doesn’t offer me anything, because He doesn’t let you enjoy life. I live in the real world.”

What if those who suffer, saw the way we dealt with pain, suffering, and disappointment? This may or may not be why GOD allows tragedy and mishaps to come upon Christians. Mind you, we live in a fallen world, and thus we are all subject to the same laws of probability for troubles related to calamities as the next person is. Yet as a Christian, we should take our tragedies and use them as an example of how our Father in heaven gives us the ability to live beyond our sufferings and disappointments of life. His loving mercy allows us to be free enough

to learn and grow through our trials and tribulations, just like the Apostles did.

When I go through trials and tribulations, I try to think of someone I know who is going through worse things, and I consider how they deal with it. For me I don't have to look too far, because my wife is a paraplegic confined to a wheelchair. She has been in one since 9:10 pm on October 26, 1987. See, I know because we were in the same car with two other girls that went off a 35 foot embankment. The girl driving the car died, one girl lost the use of her arm, and my future wife ended up in a wheelchair. Unlike my wife, I walked away from that accident with scratches and bruises.

Now this happened many years ago, and before we both gave our lives to Christ; however, she still has many trials and tribulations related to the injuries she received from the accident. Seeing her dealing with the consequences of our drunken road trip gives me the strength to get through difficult times in my life. I'm reminded daily, "But for the grace of GOD there go I."

Unlike my wife and I, the Apostles did not go through trials and tribulations because of the consequences of their sins. Their trials and tribulations came about because of who they followed, Christ Jesus. One day Peter and John were flogged and ordered not to speak in the name of Jesus. When they were released, they considered it worthy to be able to suffer for the name of Christ.

"When they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name"

(Acts 5:40-41)

The Apostles said this because they were told by Jesus,

"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice

*and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven,
for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

(Matthew 5:11-12)

James tells us that we should consider it all joy when we encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of our faith produces endurance.

*“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various
trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces
patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you
may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”*

(James 1:1-2)

These and other passages describe rejoicing, not in spite of the suffering, but because of it. Paul tells us not to lose heart over the fact that our flesh is decaying with age and infirmities:

*“because our trials will renew our spirit
daily.....for the things which are seen are temporal,
but the things which are not seen are eternal,”*

(2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

A few short paragraphs later, he described the many trials and tribulations he went through.

*“in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths
often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.
Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times
I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in
journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of
my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city,
in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among
false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in
hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness”*

(2 Corinthians 11:23-27)

Paul even suffered from a lifelong malady that he prayed to GOD about. Yet each time the answer was the same.

“And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

(2 Corinthians 12:7-9)

It's been said that Paul's faith in GOD was persistent, consistent, and profound. He may have started out as a persecuting serial murderer of those who followed Jesus Christ, but after his conversion he became a tireless worker for the Gospel and finished well. He was the greatest and most successful evangelical missionary preacher the world had ever seen. It's without a doubt that in times of struggle and hardships we can shine the brightest and reach the lost better than at any other time. We just need to face our pain and suffering like Christ did. It was Christ who set the example for the Apostles to follow, and eventually it changed an empire. Tertullian who wrote in 197 A.D.,

“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.”

(“The Apology of Tertullian for the Christians”)

Like many, most of my suffering comes from my own selfish desires to live my life my way, instead of HIS. I feel unworthy to complain about the trials and tribulations I face because of my sins. Yet, I know that regardless of the reason for my trials, He is there for me, and will give me comfort in my time of need. If one day I am honored to suffer the ultimate price for Him, then I pray I will do so proudly by standing tall and walking the walk that many have walked before me.

I stated earlier that we all have a 50% chance of choosing what is right and what is wrong in this fallen world. However, that's only if you put your faith in the world. If your faith is in the ONE who died for your salvation and you always go to HIM when you make important,

and even some non important decisions, then you can be assured that your choices can be 100% correct all the time.

Knowing this, you can be assured that, even if you stumble and fall into a season of pain and suffering, our FATHER will give you comfort and strength in your time of need. A strength HE wants us to use so that we can be an example to those whose faith is weak. Remember, His strength is made perfect in our weakness, so we must boldly approach our infirmities and hardships with the knowledge that one day, maybe sooner than we realize, we will receive a greater prize than this world has to offer. This is one of the greatest lessons we can teach those lost in the world. So ask not why you suffer, but praise GOD for the chance to shine as an example just as our Lord was for us.

I pray that those who have ears to hear, will hear His voice and call upon the name of the lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

Who Created Evil?

I want to remind you, the reader, to understand the importance of knowing what the Scriptures say about the GOD you worship and the existence of evil in the world. So while I wrote this book to help you understand the Scriptures GOD gave us, I implore you to continue studying the Scriptures daily, and pray for wisdom and understanding so you will be so familiar with the Word that no one can ever lead you astray. So be a Berean⁵¹ by searching the Scriptures and please do not just blindly accept all I write, just because I wrote this book.

Now the debate about who created evil is an important one since atheists and skeptics use the existence of evil in their arguments against theism. An argument for some doctrines is that if GOD created everything, and if evil is in the world, then it goes without saying that GOD created evil? After all, we are told as Christians to believe what the Bible says. Even a popular children's song has in its lyrics, *"Jesus loves me, this I know for the Bible tells me so"*. So, let's read what the Bible says, after all the Bible itself is the best commentary one can use to understand the Scriptures, so let's start by what Genesis tells us;

"In the beginning GOD created the heavens and the earth."
(Genesis 1:1)

Then we read in John's Gospel;

"All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made."
(John 1:3)

⁵¹ Acts 17:11

Thus, the Scriptures clearly state that GOD made everything through Christ, but are there any Scriptures that specifically say GOD is the author of evil? Well, the closest we can find are two quotes by the prophets Isaiah and Amos.

“I make peace and create calamity (evil).” “If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done it?”
(Isaiah 45:7)

“If a trumpet is blown in a city will not the people tremble? If a calamity (evil) occurs in a city has not the Lord done it?”
(Amos 3:6)

Continuing along this line, we know GOD creates calamity, but are there any specific Scriptures that might even allude to GOD condoning evil in and of itself? The best I can offer is the time Joseph confronted his brothers many years after they had sold him into slavery, and the time GOD sent Moses to Pharaoh with a message, first one is Joseph talking to his brothers,

“you meant evil against me; but GOD meant it for good”
(Genesis 50:20)

Next is GOD speaking to Pharaoh,

“.....I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.”
(Exodus 9:16)

These, and similar Scriptures like them, are examples used by those who claim GOD is the author of evil. Now, if you're coming from the persuasion that GOD has foreordained the entire course of events in this world, as most of the modern day Calvinists do, then reason and logic would suggest that GOD must be the author of evil. However, Calvinists who truly believe that GOD is the author of evil would be wise to pay attention to the following two quotes. One from John Calvin himself, and the other by the prominent Calvinist Pastor, John McArther;

“... the Lord had declared that "everything that he had made . . . was exceedingly good" [Genesis 1:31]. Whence, then comes this wickedness to man, that he should fall away from his God? Lest we should think it comes from creation, God had put His stamp of approval on what had come forth from himself. By his own evil intention, then, man corrupted the pure nature he had received from the Lord; and by his fall drew all his posterity with him into destruction. Accordingly, we should contemplate the evident cause of condemnation in the corrupt nature of humanity-which is closer to us-rather than seek a hidden and utterly incomprehensible cause in God's predestination.”

(John Calvin Institutes, 3:23:8)

“It is helpful, I think, to understand that sin is not itself a thing created. Sin is neither substance, being, spirit, nor matter. So it is technically not proper to think of sin as something that was created. Sin is simply a lack of moral perfection in a fallen creature. Fallen creatures themselves bear full responsibility for their sin. And all evil in the universe emanates from the sins of fallen creatures.”

(John McArthur)

(www.gty.org/library/articles/A189/is-god-responsible-for-evil)

It would seem to me that there is a bit of a schism in the ranks of the Calvinist movement. As for Isaiah 45:7 and Amos 3:6, both verses have been proven to be inaccurate translations from the original texts. Follow my reason here closely.

In these verses the word evil, not calamity, is used in 12 of the 21 Bible translations I have investigated. It's important to note that all but one of the translations using the word, "evil," were published before 1947. Why is this important, you may ask? Well, because of a historic discovery in 1947. That's when a shepherd boy was bored, and decided to throw some rocks up into a cave above the valley floor. What he heard was pottery being broken with his rock. When he climbed to

investigate, he discovered manuscripts made of leather, papyrus, and copper, what is now known as the Dead Sea Scrolls.

This discovery would shatter the argument secularists use that Jesus lived before the prophecies of HIS birth, life, death, and resurrection were ever written. These scrolls, which were nearly all dated from the 3rd to the 1st century BC, are the oldest manuscripts ever found. The 15,000 fragments represent the remains of 800 to 900 original manuscripts. Of these manuscripts, the best-preserved documents include an Isaiah Scroll. After exhaustive and painstaking investigation, it has been learned that the Scrolls reveal the proper word used in Isaiah 45:7. The word used is not, “evil,” but rather, ”calamity,” which is the same word used in Amos 3:6.

So we can see from Isaiah and Amos that GOD creates calamity, but not evil. To drive this home you must understand that in addition to being omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent, GOD is infinite (HE has no beginning or end), GOD is immutable (HE never changes), GOD is self-sufficient, GOD is perfect (HE has no blemishes), GOD is good, wise and just. HE is faithful, merciful and gracious. GOD is loving and personal (HE desires that we do good and prosper). GOD is Spirit and does not tell lies.

Finally, GOD is holy and our sin will separate us from HIS presence. If we acknowledge our sin and ask for forgiveness, believing that Jesus Christ is the SON of GOD and was resurrected from the grave, then we are saved. Our fellowship with GOD is restored because GOD sees only the righteousness of Christ in us.

Yes there is evil in this world but God did not create it, GOD does however use calamity. Now some argue that a calamity is an evil, because it causes pain and misery. Thus they will still argue that GOD is the creator of evil. However, when speaking of evil, in regards to the nature of sin, it should be observed that there are three kinds of evil: physical evil, metaphysical evil, and moral evil.

- **Physical evil is a calamity** that causes harm to man, whether it be by order of nature directly, or through the various social conditions

under which mankind naturally exists. I would offer that accidents, sicknesses, and even most deaths would directly be caused by nature, while poverty, oppression and some diseases are the results of imperfect social organizations. We could then add mental suffering like anxiety, disappointments, and remorse as a result of both natural disposition and social circumstances.

- **Metaphysical evil is a calamity** that can limit an object in nature from attaining its ideal potential of existence. Some examples would be a lion killing a gazelle for food. Harm or death to the gazelle would be a metaphysical evil. Another metaphysical evil would be a tornado knocking down a tree, thus limiting the tree's ability to keep growing. Now depending upon one's perspective, metaphysical evils can be classified as beneficial evils. The tree dies and becomes fertilizer for new growth, while the lion killing the gazelle will ensure the survival of the lion.
- **Moral evil is NOT a calamity.** By its nature, moral evil is very difficult for humans to observe in other humans, because we can only know what we see. It is also the most difficult to nail down in a way for everyone to truly understand, since mankind has bastardized the truth of what is and what is not moral. Humans set up standards based upon what each society decides is good or bad. Thus anything that would deviate from each society's standards are deemed as immoral behavior. However man's standard of moral evil is not always what GOD considers moral evil, and all moral evil is sin.

The word sin, comes from the greek word, ἁμαρτία, or, "*hamartia*." It was a word used in archery. When an archer missed the bullseye, they sinned. This is the standard Jesus told HIS disciples they must match when HE said;

*"Therefore you shall be perfect, just as
your Father in heaven is perfect."*

(Matthew 5:48)

GOD's mark is perfection every time. Man can never achieve the ability to hit the bull's eye each and every time. So the absence of perfection is sin, in the same way that darkness is the absence of light, cold is the absence of warmth, and hate is the absence of love. Thus, anything that falls short of a perfect GOD is evil. When I speak of evil as to whom or what is responsible for its creation, I refer to the evil that is in the realm of morality.

By eliminating GOD as the culprit, we come to the question, "If not GOD, then who created evil?" So next in line for the blame would be Satan. Like men, angels were given free will and Satan was an angel named Lucifer whom Isaiah wrote about,

"How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of GOD; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.' Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit. "Those who see you will gaze at you, and consider you, saying: 'Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms,"

(Isaiah 14:12-16)

It's believed that Lucifer was cast out of heaven prior to the creation of man, after he chose of his own free will to rebel against GOD. So we can ascertain that evil, as we know it, began at the spiritual level first, as committed by Satan. That does not mean that Satan created evil though, because we learn from the book of Job that outside of GOD's will, Satan has no power. So we can conclude that Satan is not the author of sin, or evil, because he does not have the power to create anything.

"So Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear GOD for nothing? Have You not made a hedge around him,

around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!” And the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person.” So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.”
(Job 1:9-12)

Next we must investigate Adam to see if he created evil. In the beginning man, nature, and GOD were all in a perfect tri-unity of harmony, communing with each other as man was given dominion over all that was in the world. Paul tells us in Romans that it was not until after Eve was tempted by Satan to eat of the tree, of knowledge of good and evil, that sin or evil entered into the world.

“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned”
(Romans 5:12)

Like Satan, man was given free will to either follow GOD or not, and man chose not to follow GOD. We can surmise that just as Satan was the first to commit sin at the spiritual level, man was the first to commit sin in the physical world. However, like Satan, man cannot create anything without the will of GOD, and even then only with what GOD created for man to use in his inventions and discoveries. So our investigation leads us to the conclusion that, like Satan, man may have sinned but he is not the author of it. In Paul's letter to Romans, we also learn that man's offense allowed evil to come into the world, but Paul does not suggest that man is the author creating it.

“Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.”
(Romans 5:18)

So, we have examined the obvious choices and still have no answer to the question, “Who created evil?” Maybe this little analogy of a father who gives his son a baseball and bat will help. Now I realize this is not a perfect analogy, but it does help to look at things from a father's perspective.

As a gift of his love for his son, a father gives a baseball and a bat to his eight-year old boy. After he gives the gift to his son, the father tells the boy to not play with the bat and ball near any homes, lest he break someone's window. The boy smiles and takes his new gifts and goes outside to play with them.

He grabs the bat with his hand, rests it upon his shoulder and throws the ball in the air with his other hand. As the ball descends he swings the bat at the ball. To his complete enjoyment, the boy hits the ball squarely and it goes sailing into the air. As the baseball flies across the yard, it enters the neighbors yard and smashes into their living room window.

As would be expected the neighbor confronts the boy about his window, and tells him he needs to fix that which he broke. That's when the boy's father gets involved. The father apologizes to the neighbor and promises to fix his window. The reason the father must do this, is because the boy has no means of rectifying the mistake he made. While the father himself did not break the neighbor's window, he does accept the responsibility for giving his son the ball and bat that allowed for the possibility that something bad could happen.

In return, the boy will have to suffer the consequences of his actions by mowing lawns to pay for the window or even lose the chance to play with his ball and bat. The boy himself will not pay for nor fix the broken window, his father does, and so it is with our Father in heaven when we sin.

When GOD created man, HE created a perfect being, not a perfect robot like a Chatty Cathy doll that says, “I love you, I love you,” every time GOD pulls a string attached to us. HE created a being that is able to make reasoned and highly intelligent choices, just as Lucifer was, but not as compelled by nature as an animal is. However, a perfect being

means it also has the perfect ability to defile oneself. Even to self-destruction if so desired. We have all been given the gift of free will, and with it comes the potential for committing sin. Which is what we will do, as proven by Adam and Eve.

Praise GOD HE has already accepted the responsibility and paid for our sins, even though HE HIMSELF did not commit the sin that enabled the whole of mankind to fall.

“All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”

(Revelation 13:8)

Mind you, while we have the ability of free will to reject GOD, we do not have the ability to pay the price on our own accord to satisfy GOD for our sins. Just as the eight year old has no way to satisfy the neighbor for breaking his window. Our FATHER in heaven did what a loving father would do, HE paid for that broken window, which in my analogy represents our sin. Thus GOD became man, and fulfilled the requirements needed to become the perfect sacrifice to pay for our sins.

“but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

(Philippians 2:7-8)

I have concluded that evil is not a thing created, but rather evil is the result, or byproduct, of disobeying GOD's law, which is lawlessness. The Scriptures tell us that GOD desires for us to choose Him willingly, He is not some kind of a cosmic rapist who will force His love upon us.

“Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.”

(1 John 3:4)

However, if we choose not to love HIM, then an emptiness is created in our hearts. I refer to this emptiness as, “Our Addictive GOD Gene.” An empty spot in our heart that we will inevitably try to fill with the pleasures of sin if we do not respond to HIS voice. Evil is a natural probability when free will is allowed to exist in one’s nature, and GOD gave us free will to make that choice.

Remember, GOD is love, and evil is the result of rejecting HIS perfect love. By rejecting HIS perfect love, we reject HIS perfect way, and that brings about evil. John tells us that GOD loved us first,⁵² and because of that love, HE took responsibility for our rejection of HIS perfect way by sending HIS SON to become the propitiation for our transgressions. HIS sacrifice created a pathway for us to be accepted back into communion with the Lover of our soul. So even though GOD did not, and cannot sin, He paid the price for our sin like a truly loving Father would,

*“so that whosoever believes in Him shall
not perish but have everlasting life.”*
(John 3:16)

I pray that those who have ears to hear, will hear His voice and call upon the name of the lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

⁵² 1 John 4:8-10

Understanding GOD's Parallel Spiritual World?

In today's technological age, it might seem silly for intelligent people to consider a spiritual world where beings we cannot see might exist. Oh it's fine to read fantasy novels or watch Hollywood movies about the afterlife and spirits that roam the netherworld, forever trapped in another dimension we cannot relate to, but that's all nonsense. After all, in the real world we're taught that reality consists of what we can touch, taste, see, hear, and smell right? All that talk about a spirit world existing in a parallel universe is for those weak minded individuals who need nonsensical religions for a crutch to get through the day. At least that's what the world tells us.

Yet, what if I told you that secular scientists believe there's good scientific evidence which points to the possibility that parallel universes really do exist? As a Christian I don't need proof that a spirit world exists, but I also believe GOD wants us to do our utmost to understand what it is He has Created. That being said, the Spirit world is an aspect of GOD's Creation that we can only speculate upon like Rene Descartes,⁵³ the father of modern day philosophy did. Descartes admitted that GOD was the Creator of the world, but he believed that the spiritual world existed solely in the minds of men. So I guess the question would be, does a parallel spirit world exist, or is it just a figment of our fertile imaginations?

I would suggest that in order to properly answer that question, we need to first realize that GOD gave us a mind and the ability to think on

⁵³ René Descartes' (1596-1650) "Proofs of God's Existence" 1641 treatise (formal philosophical observation) "Meditations on First Philosophy," first appearing in "Meditation III. of God:

a level with Him, if only we would allow ourselves to put the silly notions of man's wisdom aside. One silly notion is that reality only exists within the dimension that our physical bodies dwell in. In other words, most modern day philosophers follow Descartes and claim that our whole existence is based upon our five senses. But then they must totally ignore modern science that proves a spirit world can and does exist even if we may have difficulty imagining it.

Consider for a moment how much more space is in an atom than solid matter; in fact there are some 30,000 times more space than there is mass. A hydrogen atom made up of one proton and a single orbiting electron is a perfect example of the enormous amount of space in an atom. If you could enlarge the proton of a hydrogen atom to the size of a baseball, the electron of that atom would be about the size of a BB rotating around the proton ten miles away at the speed of 10,000 miles a second.

Now if the earth were a proton and the moon an electron and the space between them had the same ratio that exists in a hydrogen atom, the moon would be 1,000 times farther away than it is now. Think of it this way, if all the atoms in your body should suddenly collapse, leaving no space between the solid matter, we would need a very powerful microscope to find you. You would, in essence, be a microscopic speck of dust, but you would still weigh exactly what you do now.

Now let's consider the dwarf stars whose density is much greater than that of atoms on earth. There is a star of the first magnitude called Sirius also called, "Dog Star", in 1888 they discovered it was actually a double star.⁵⁴ ⁵⁵The smaller of the two stars is called Sirius B, also referred to as "A pup". This pup is a dwarf star that rotates around the major star. The density of this pup is thought to be so great that one cubic inch of Sirius B would weigh 1,700 pounds by earth's gravitational standards. Putting it in easily understandable terms, a

⁵⁴ *THE STAR GUIDE A Unique System for Identifying the Brightest Stars in the Night Sky Revised – CELESTIAL SPORT EDITION Vol. 1: Introduction, Rising Stars of Winter – May 26, 2021, Authors; Steven L Beyer & Andrea E Beyer*

⁵⁵ *Sirius: Brightest Diamond in the Night Sky – 2007, Author Jay B. Holberg*

150-pound person standing on its surface would weigh 50 million pounds! By comparison a neutron star is about a million times denser than these dwarf stars are. One cubic inch of a neutron star would weigh 1.75 billion pounds so a 200- pound person standing on a neutron star would weigh 50 trillion pounds.⁵⁶ The kicker is there would still be space in a cubic inch of dirt from those stars.

So, knowing that all this space exists in an atom, many experts in the field of atomic energy have come to the conclusion that it is theoretically possible for parallel worlds to coexist at the same time in the same space, both passing through the other, unaware of each other's existence.⁵⁷ All it would take, they theorize, is for each world to be made up of different molecular structures. Well, I would suggest that these highly educated molecular scientists read what the Scriptures have to say about the idea of a parallel universe.

Throughout the Bible we find evidence of a coexisting world where GOD, His angels, and even Satan lives. Outside of the influence that they exert on our lives, we are unaware of their presence. They see us and interact with us on a daily basis by exerting a tremendous amount of influence to direct us in a Godly or evil way depending. Paul told the Ephesians,

*“we do not struggle against flesh and blood, but
against principalities, against powers, against the
rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual
hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”*
(Ephesians 6:12)

There are numerous examples in the Scriptures of members from the spiritual world crossing over and making themselves known to members of man's tangible world. After all, to those in the spiritual

⁵⁶ *Practice of Physics: Custom Edition for the University of Minnesota Textbook Binding – January 1, 2015 Author Eric Mazur*

⁵⁷ “Universe: Do Parallel Universes Really Exist?” Andrew Williams 2013 University of Oxford, Department of Physics.

world there is no wall separating us, the only separation exists in man's inability to see their world.

In one of the most dramatic incidents of the spiritual world and the physical world mixing it up, (other than the time GOD incarnated into a human body) we read of Elisha asking GOD to open the eyes of his servant so he could see that the Lord had surrounded the Aramean⁵⁸ army with a myriad of horses and chariots of fire.⁵⁹ Then there was the time when GOD allowed Satan to tempt Job.⁶⁰ Another classic example would be the story of when an angel of the Lord spoke to Balaam through his donkey.⁶¹ We also see Jacob wrestling with an angel the night before he was to meet his brother Esau for the first time in over 20 years.⁶² My final example is the conversion of the Christian persecutor, Saul of Tarsus, whom Jesus met on the road to Damascus.⁶³

From the moment GOD spoke the universe into existence there have been two separate universes coexisting together. Even in the most ancient of times various false pagan religious beliefs consisted of their GODs living in a separate world that would from time to time interact with mortals of this world. However, Christianity is the only religion whose very core consists of its very GOD entering man's world to live in a mortal body so that HE could experience punishment and death so that HE could save man from our sins. Through His death and ultimate resurrection we now have the chance to actually live in His spiritual world for eternity.

After centuries of rejecting the idea of a spirit world, scientists like Michio Kaku,⁶⁴ are now coming to the conclusion that the idea of parallel universes is not as far-fetched as they used to believe. They have even gone so far as to suggest the Big Bang wasn't what set

⁵⁸ Some translation read Syrian

⁵⁹ 2 Kings 6:8-23

⁶⁰ Job 1:6-12

⁶¹ Numbers 22:22-33

⁶² Genesis 32:22-32

⁶³ Acts 9:1-30

⁶⁴ *Hyperspace: A Scientific Odyssey Through Parallel Universes, Time Warps, and the 10th Dimension Paperback – 1995, Author Dr Michio Kaku (mkaku.org)*

everything in motion, and instead time and space not only always existed, but Big Bangs happen all the time. Some physicists even go so far as to suggest what created the universe we live in was two parallel universes colliding together; they also claim such collisions between parallel universes could happen again at any time without notice. Again, do not take my word for this, just read their own published works. All of which are readily available for anyone to find.^{65 66 67}

Isn't it great that secular scientists have finally accepted what we the followers of GOD knew since Adam walked in the cool of the day⁶⁸ with the Creators of those parallel universes? We never needed scientific proof that a spiritual parallel universe exists. However, if believers truly understood the ramifications of a spiritual world coexisting with ours, then many Christians would not continually struggle with life in this physical universe we live in.

Consider the fact that everything you say and do is seen and heard by GOD from HIS spiritual world. Even your thoughts and the desires of your heart are not hidden from HIM. That is why Jesus tells us in HIS greatest Sermon;

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."
(Matthew 5:27-28)

Having knowledge of everything is called Omniscience, which means GOD fully knows Himself and all things actual and possible in

⁶⁵ Princeton University - Prof Paul Steinhardt
<http://feynman.princeton.edu/%7Esteinh/>

⁶⁶ Superstring phenomenology and the brane-world - 1995, Author, Fernando Quevedo, Department of Applied Mathematics and Theoretical Physics (DAMTP) Cambridge University Wilberforce Road, Cambridge, CB3 0WA, UK

⁶⁷ The Elegant Universe: superstrings, hidden dimensions and the quest for the ultimate theory - 1999, Author; Brian Greene; Parallel Universes: the search for other worlds- 1990 Author; Fred Alan Wolf; Flatland: a romance of many dimensions -1884, Author; Edwin Abbott Abbott, & Kendahl J Jubb.

⁶⁸ Genesis 3:8

one simple and eternal act. Elihu tells us in Job that GOD is the ONE “who is perfect in knowledge”,⁶⁹ while the disciple John tells us that “GOD knows everything”.⁷⁰ God is the ONE before whom no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare before HIS eyes. Knowing this should make you cringe every time you sin or even desire in your heart to sin. From HIS parallel universe, HE can see your hearts desires, and even though you do not act upon them in the flesh, your hearts desire to do so is a violation even in HIS spiritual world we cannot see.

Think about it, if you could see the same parallel world Elisha opened the eyes of his servant to see,⁷¹ then you would not be afraid of anything in this world. YHowever, you would also realize you are never alone, because GOD truly sees all. John Wooden’s famous quote comes to mind,

“The true test of a man’s character is
what he does when no one is watching.”

(John Wooden. UCLA Men's Basketball Coach 1948–1975)

Knowing we are never alone, should give every Christian the confidence to talk to GOD as we do with our best friend while walking in the park. Thanks to Jesus we can now boldly approach the throne of grace and commune with our Father in heaven, Whom resides in that parallel spirit world. Just as Adam once walked with GOD in the cool of the day before the fall, so too can we walk and talk with GOD. Which is also similar to the relationship the ancient prophets had with HIm.

I realized many years ago that if I truly wanted to be as close to GOD as the ancient prophets were, then I needed to do my due diligence and read the Scriptures everyday. I often hear Christians claim we can never truly understand the mind of GOD, but I disagree with that statement, because HE gave us the written Word so we can understand HIS mind. Solomons tells us;

⁶⁹ Job 36:4

⁷⁰ 1 John 3:20

⁷¹ 2 kings 6;17

*"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And
the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."*

(Proverbs 9:10)

A believer's fear of GOD, means to be in reverence and awe of HIS Holiness as the author and perfecter of our faith. This is the motivating factor for us to surrender to the Creator of the Universe. When we surrender to HIM, we are agreeing to obey HIS precepts, and the way we obey them is to be studious in HIS Word. By studying the Scriptures we will not only gain wisdom and knowledge, but we will also gain understanding as to how we can put to use that wisdom and knowledge. If we, as children of Christ, truly have a desire to better understand the mind of GOD, then we must read about HIS mind, and the only place we can read about the mind of GOD is in the Scriptures. It is this reason I have always prayed to get wisdom and knowledge, and in all my getting I also pray for understanding. By doing so, I am guaranteed I will be able to defend the truth while helping my fellow Christians from falling prey to the smooth talking wolves in sheeps clothing.

The lessons from Proverbs are more enduring than any college course you could pay for. Everyone should read one a day, and it's easy to know which one, just look at the day on the calendar.

*"To know wisdom and Instruction,
To perceive the words of understanding,
To receive the instruction of wisdom,
Justice, judgment, and equity;
To give prudence to the simple,
To the young man knowledge and discretion—
A wise man will hear and increase learning,
And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel,
To understand a proverb and an enigma,
The words of the wise and their riddles.
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
But fools despise wisdom and instruction."*

(Proverbs 1:2-7)

“Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; Love her, and she will keep you. Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding.”
(Proverbs 4:5-7)

*“My son, eat honey because it is good, And the honeycomb which is sweet to your taste;
So shall the knowledge of wisdom be to your soul; If you have found it, there is a prospect, And your hope will not be cut off.”*
(Proverbs 24:13-14)

Paul tells us in Ephesians⁷², that some will be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, yet to even be considered to be any of these, you must be immersed in the Word. If we spend as much time in constant contact with GOD as the ancient prophets did, then HE will reveal to us the things we so desperately need to know. That's because the lessons we learn from HIS Words will affect our heart, and that is when HE will direct our steps. In essence we will be walking with HIM in the cool of the day, and nothing can come between us.⁷³ This is how we can be assured to walk circumspectly as if we are already in heaven with the Lover of our soul. By doing so, we are allowing ourselves to be what we are all called to be, servants of the most High GOD. So, if we then strive to always be in HIS presence, we are in effect allowing the eyes of our mind to be with HIM in that parallel spiritual universe.

This is not an impossibility, because we are HIS special creation of whom HE gave a soul to. While the animals resemble man in certain aspects, man surpasses them. That's because when GOD made man HE breathed into our nostrils the breath of life, something HE did not do with the animals.

⁷² Ephesians 4:11

⁷³ Proverbs 16:9

*“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of
the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the
breath of life; and man became a living being.”*
(Genesis 2:7)

This image of God consists of the spiritual part of man that reflects the character of God. It is the only firm basis for advocating the dignity of man, the sanctity of life, and the gracious redemption of sinners. So, what does this mean? It means we can go through Christ Jesus and talk directly to GOD, Who coexists in both parallel worlds of which the secular scientists now actually agree exists.

I pray that those who have ears to hear, will hear His voice and call upon the name of the lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

What About The Sabbath?

Inevitably, every Christian will at one time or another bump into another Christian who advocates the belief that Saturday is the true Sabbath. They will be told that unless Christians go to Church on Saturday, they are in violation of the fourth Commandment⁷⁴ that calls for us to honor the Sabbath. This may not seem like a big problem, but some misguided Christians can really put doubt in the minds of Christians who are not as schooled on the Scriptures as they should be. The question of honoring or not honoring the Sabbath comes down to whether you believe Jesus accomplished HIS work on the cross, or HE didn't.

In the second chapter of this book, I explained how Christians must walk circumspectly. Instead of walking as if we are alive in the world, we must walk as if we are dead to it; while walking like we are already in Heaven. One way we do this is to properly understand the WORD of GOD.

When Jesus was tempted by Satan, in the desert; the weapon HE used to defeat the devil's temptation was Scripture.⁷⁵ Mind you, Satan has been around since before creation, so he knows Scripture better than the best theologians. After all, he was there throughout history while Scripture was being written. Like Jesus, if we truly desire to defeat temptations of the world, then we must use the same tactic Jesus used. This is why Christians should start off their day by putting on the whole armor of GOD.

⁷⁴ Exodus 20:8

⁷⁵ Matthew 4:1-11

“Therefore take up the whole armor of GOD, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of GOD;”

(Ephesians 6:13-17)

One of the pieces of armor mentioned is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of GOD. Of all the military gear that GOD issues HIS children, the sword is the only offensive weapon, all others are defensive weapons. This speaks of the holiness and power of the Word of GOD. Other than prayer, the sword of the Spirit is the greatest spiritual weapon a believer can use, and during HIS three year ministry, the Word was always His most powerful weapon. No warrior would ever go to battle without his greatest weapon. So too, a Christian should never go out into the world without their best weapon. After all, Satan’s minions are lurking around every corner to sift an unprepared saint.⁷⁶

Which brings me back to the argument about whether a Christian should honor the fourth Commandment by keeping the Sabbath or not. In HIS ministry, Jesus never once broke the fourth commandment, which required all Jews to observe the Sabbath. Jesus was after all a Jew. However, He did give us a clue that a change to the Sabbath was coming.

To make my point, you must first understand that the original manuscripts of the Scriptures were not divided into verses and chapters. The Old Testament manuscripts were written by scribes for the religious leaders to study. The New Testament manuscripts were letters originally written to be dispersed amongst the believers to read. They were like the letters you receive today. Just a document written in sentences with no verse or chapter numbers, so you really had to know

⁷⁶ Luke 22:31

the transcripts well in order to recite any information you needed while sharing the Gospel.

It wasn't until the mid 16th century when a Frenchman named, Robert Estienne⁷⁷ (better known as Robertus Stephanus), would divide the Scriptures into chapters and verses. Thanks to him we can now find passages by memorizing chapters and verses. I must admit, that while I do believe every Word of the Bible is the inspired Word of GOD, I do not believe that all the places Stephanus decided to split sentences up into different verses or chapters were inspired. I say this, because there are many instances in the Scriptures where a reader can be distracted or misled as to the context of an incident in how it was originally meant to be taken. Especially since many times a reader will stop reading at the end of a chapter, thus missing the importance of the connection to the next chapter.

Case in point is chapters 11 and 12 of Matthew's Gospel. I personally believe that Stephanus made a critical mistake by ending Matthew chapter 11 at verse 30. It's my belief Matthew chapter 11 should have had 14 more verses for a total of 44. Thus the chapter would have also included the following statement by Jesus,

“For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”
(Matthew 12:8)

Pay close attention to the following information I offer, because it's quite valuable in an apologetical debate on why so many are mistaken in their belief that Christians should observe Saturday as the Sabbath.

Continuing from the statement above by Jesus, I would like to direct your attention to the end of Matthew chapter 11. This is where Jesus just finished denouncing the cities HE did miracles in for their unrepentant hearts. Jesus goes on to say a prayer of praise to HIS FATHER, and then calls those in need of rest to come to Him.

⁷⁷ Robert Estienne, Royal Printer: An Historical Study of the elder Stephanus Illustrated Edition - 1954, Author, Elizabeth Armstrong

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”
(Matthew 11:28-30)

By speaking on the concept of rest, the Jewish audience would automatically think of the Sabbath rest which God gave them. They were first told about this gift when Moses presented God’s Ten Commandments, to the people to follow. As Moses read the tablets, he said,

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your GOD. In it you shall do no work: “you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.”
(Exodus 20:8-11)

It’s important to understand that while Matthew’s Gospel was targeting the Jews, it did contain a universal outlook. In other words, he wrote it for a Jewish audience, but also had non Jewish Christians in mind.

So when he wrote this portion of the letter, he purposely put these three moments together in a way that the readers would understand he was informing them about our Lord their Sabbath rest. Thus the day we worship does not matter, but rather Who we worship is what matters. Matthew deliberately pointed out how Jesus taught them about a rest, and then continued the thought process through verse 14 of chapter 12. Without a chapter break, the recipients of the letter would have understood what Matthew was conveying.

In verses 1-14 of chapter 12, Matthew points out how Jesus was first confronted because HIS disciples were gleaning food on the Sabbath. Then again later, because Jesus healed a man in the synagogue on the Sabbath. These two confrontations, over the Sabbath with the Pharisees, go hand in hand with Matthew telling his readers, at the end of chapter 11, about the time Jesus called those in need of rest to come to Him. After this discussion, Matthew then tells the readers that Jesus left the synagogue and all discussion of the Sabbath has ended.

Considering Matthew was a tax collector, he would group things in a way that would allow the readers of his letter to properly understand a point he is driving home before moving onto another topic. This is why Matthew's Gospel is not written in sequence as the incidents took place, but rather he put incidents in groups to make his point on the subject matters. In consideration of these facts, you can now understand that chapter 11 should have a total of 44 verses, instead of 30. This would eliminate the problem where many today have fallen into a legalistic misunderstanding of the Sabbath. It makes perfect sense for the next chapter to begin where Matthew wrote,

*"But Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there.
Many followed Him, and He healed them all."
(Matthew 12:15 NASB)*

This is important, because when Jesus died on the cross, He fulfilled all the requirements of the Law, including the one that calls for us to obey the Sabbath. We read about HIS last moment on the cross in John's Gospel.

*"So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, **"It is finished!"** And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit."
(John 19:30)*

Thank GOD, because just as we are not bound by the need to go through a High Priest with an animal to offer as a sacrifice for our sins, we also are free from the need to follow the Jewish Laws. We can reach GOD through Christ, on any day and anytime we so desire, without

going through the commandments of the law which were completely fulfilled and abolished on the cross.

After almost 1500 years, the Jews showed they could not follow the Law, so with Christ fulfilling it and the ceremonial ones, we are free from the law. With Jesus being the Lord of the Sabbath, we are free to choose any day, anytime, and any place to gather for communion and celebration of Him. Today there are no legalistic requirements for us to follow. Jesus either abolished all the requirements or none of them, we cannot have it both ways.

Any Christian following any portion of the Law, is doing what Paul preached against when he chastised the Judaizers, who were attempting to put the Corinthians Christians back into bondage of the Law. Paul was very direct in the words he chose to use in his letter to the Colossians about Sabbaths,

*“Let no one judge you in food or in drink, or
regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths”*
(Colossians 2:16)

Paul also wrote that, if you observe any part of the Old Law, then you must follow it all.⁷⁸ Does anyone truly want to be bound by the full weight of a law that GOD’s own people could never follow? The answer should be a resounding NO. Praise GOD, because we are free to worship HIM anywhere, on any day, and at any time by going through the One who fulfilled and abolished the law. Thus, setting us free from a Law which we could never dream of keeping.

*“For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit
against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another,
so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if
you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”*
(Galatians 5:17:18)

So if you are not under the law, you are not under any obligations to any of the ceremonial requirements either. Nor are you bound by the

⁷⁸ James 2:9-11

Jewish Sabbath as pointed out in Paul's letter to the Colossians. Anyone who feels obligated to the abolished symbolism of the Old Law is keeping themselves from truly enjoying all the freedom GOD offers us through HIS Son's death and Resurrection, which is the true rest we have been given.

I pray those who have ears to hear, will hear His voice and call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, who paid the price for all our sins.

Amen

Ten Virgins

To get a proper understanding of the mindset that Jesus was in as He presented the parable of the ten virgins, one must go back to Matthew chapter 23, where he said,

"The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger."

(Matthew 23:2-4)

Jesus was chastising the scribes and the Pharisees for pretty much being false followers who did terrible things to GOD's Children. He accused them of acting self righteous, when in fact they were no better than whitewashed tombs with dead men's bones inside. He explained how their twisting of the teachings handed down to Moses was actually a rejection of the GOD they claimed to follow. Like the time He accused them of being of their father the devil,⁷⁹ He now tells them they are witnesses against themselves, because they are the sons of those who persecuted and murdered the prophets, and will do the same things to those who are and will follow in His name.

Mind you, in Jesus Christ we are all priests. So we can share the Good News and win souls for Christ, baptize them, and thus free them from the condemnation of the Law. Once the Jewish people learned there was no need for an unbelieving High Priest to sacrifice an animal for their salvation, the Religious leaders would lose their power over

⁷⁹ John 8:44

them. Thus the people would be free to worship God as Jesus leads them to. Like the Jews who accepted Jesus, we gentiles are also free from the shackles of men who claim we need to go through them to reach God. This confrontation in chapter 23 would be the last time Jesus would confront the religious leaders until His arrest and crucifixion.

*"for I say to you, you shall see Me
no more till you, say 'Blessed is He
who comes in the name of the LORD!'"*
(Matthew 23:39)

Jesus put the religious leaders on notice that their time was up. He literally kicked the dust off his sandals, just like He told his disciples to do if a house or city rejected them when He sent them out by twos.⁸⁰

As we move to chapter 24, we see Jesus explaining how bad the last days will be, which He refers to as the “beginning of the sorrows”.⁸¹ He lists the tribulations, which many followers who come after them will suffer for His namesake. He goes on to inform us that the last days will be as they were in the days of Noah, when all but eight people perished in the flood because the desires of men's hearts were evil.⁸² Jesus is letting us know that as in the days of Noah, no one will know the time of HIS return, and as such we must be spiritually prepared. He also offers the analogy of a thief breaking into a house at a time when the homeowner was unaware, but had he known the time he could have prevented the theft of his valuables. This is a warning to always be prepared, because we know not when the SON of Man will return.

As we move to chapter 25, Jesus now offers a clue as to how we can be prepared in a parable of 10 Virgins. As we proceed, it must be stressed that nowhere in this parable is the word bridesmaid or bridesmaids used. The original Koine Greek is virgins, not bridesmaids,

⁸⁰ Matthew 10:14

⁸¹ Matthew 24:8

⁸² Genesis 6:5

and the term virgin in the parable relates to one's spiritual status not their physical one.

Chapter 25 begins with Jesus telling the Disciples what the kingdom of heaven will be like. By doing so, HE gives us a contrast between those who will make it into the kingdom of heaven and those who will not, by explaining the difference between them. By this time in Matthew's Gospel, we know that the kingdom of GOD will be filled with only true believers. So now Jesus is distinguishing between the true believers and the false ones.

Mind you, when speaking of Christians in the world, we are all virgins until the marriage ceremony. Some went home before us, but others have yet made it, because we must all first physically die. Those who died and made it to heaven are already married and thus are no longer virgins. To continue along this line, you must first divorce your mind from the human understanding of what a marriage is supposed to be like. The biggest difference is that there is no physical sexual consummating of a marriage to Christ as there is in human marital relationships. Instead, the consummation that takes place is a spiritual one. In legal terms, consummation is the signature that binds each party to an agreement. We do so when we sign a mortgage agreement to purchase a house, and we also do so when we get with our new bride or groom after being legally married. In our marriage to Christ, the consummation is the moment our Lord and Savior comes back to bring us to His Kingdom, which Jesus told the disciples the night HE was betrayed by Judas.

"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

(John 14:2-3)

We always liken the Church as the bride of Christ, even though there is no direct quote ever stating so in the Scriptures. It has, however, become an accepted phrase in Christian doctrine. While all Christians

are the brides of Christ, HE is in essence the bridegroom we are waiting for. This makes us virgins waiting for our bridegroom to accept us, which He will do by seeing the intentions of our hearts. Something only He and the Father can know. Our wedding is the day we leave this world and enter into a marriage as His bride, and thus we become an official member of His Kingdom. However, if we are unworthy, then like a harlot who has no loyalty to any one man, we too will be rejected. It is our hearts that decide our destination. A heart that He will know.

Like a benevolent Ruler of a vast Kingdom, who has many wives; until he approves of them by their loyalty and good characters, they are just concubines. That is why we read that Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. 700 women proved to be worthy of being his bride⁸³, the rest were just concubines. The 300 concubines were just there for the perks not the relationship. I know, it's kind of weak, but it is the best example, and like slavery is an example of sin, it is also weak because in slavery so many are forced into it, yet it fits and that's why the analogy is used.

We read that 10 virgins are awaiting the arrival of the groom, five of them are looking for a true relationship, while the other five are only there for the perks. To be considered a true Christian, you must have a desire in your heart to have an honest to God relationship with Christ before you can be considered one of His. 5 of the virgins were like the Israelites who committed harlotry by loving other god's, all the while pretending they loved the One True God. Like the Pharisees and Sadducees they never truly committed their heart to just one man. This question Jesus asked comes to mind,

“But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say? Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it

⁸³ 1 Kings 11:3

was founded on the rock. But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great."

(Luke 6:46-49)

What, or I should say the "One Who," ties it all together is the Holy Spirit. Which is the oil for the lamps. Oil has long been connected with anointing one for the service of GOD, something the Jews would be well familiar with. When Aaron and his sons were consecrated as Priests,⁸⁴ GOD had Moses anoint Aaron with oil, and then sprinkle oil on all of them. Then there was the time when Samuel anointed Saul with oil as Israel's first King that the Spirit of GOD came upon him and he prophesied with a group of prophets.⁸⁵ Throughout Scriptures, oil has been likened to an anointing from God, or rather the Spirit of God, which is the Holy Spirit. The final stage of us becoming a born again believer, is the anointing by the Holy Spirit that makes us as complete in Him as is possible, until we are taken home to be in His very presence.

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;"

(Isaiah 61:1)

"how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."

(Acts 10:38)

⁸⁴ Exodus 30:22-36

⁸⁵ 1 Samuel 10:1-16

The Pharisees claimed to follow the One true God, but refused to truly follow His teachings, because they were all about the power and possessions they could gain in this world, not what God had in store for them in heaven. They also rejected the Holy Spirit, because time and time again God warned them by having the Holy Spirit speak to them through the Scriptures they studied, and through men like Nicodemus who warned them to investigate the matter before condemning Jesus. Nicodemus was the teacher of the law, and the Holy Spirit that moved him to visit Jesus, also moved him to speak out against the plans of the Religious leaders, because he knew that Jesus was innocent.

*“Does our law judge a man before it
hears him and knows what he is doing?”*

(John 7:51)

The lamp oil represents the Holy Spirit which each and every true believer of Christ has. If you are a true believer, you will always be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, and exhort, with longsuffering and teaching.⁸⁶ The five virgins were like the religious leaders of Jesus day, they had no oil, because they did not have the Holy Spirit in them.

They are the ones the false teachers have led astray, making them believe they are saved, but the truth they shared was laced with just enough poison to lead their souls to hell instead of the kingdom of Heaven. The Pharisees Jesus confronted in ch 23 had the spirit of Satan, because they denied God's Son. Just as these five virgins had the spirit of satan instead of God. These five virgins were not the anointed ones the Bridegroom was coming for

*"Every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God;
this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard
that it is coming, and now it is already in the world."*

(1 John 4:3)

⁸⁶ 2 Timothy 4:2

Consider the billions of people worldwide who truly believe they are following the right Jesus. Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, and others lost in cults are all like the Pharisees who were actually the son of Satan and followed a different god, because they do not have the Holy Spirit indwelling them. Paul was one of them, he thought he was doing as Moses told him to. After all, he was blessed to be a Pharisee of Pharisees,⁸⁷ who was so zealous for God that he became a serial killer with a license to track down evil men who were teaching lies about his God. So he thought. That is until he had a visit by Christ on the road as he traveled to persecute more Christians in Damascus.⁸⁸

The five virgins with no oil are the tares the enemy crept in overnight and planted among the wheat in Jesus' parable of the weeds.⁸⁹ In a roundabout way, Jesus is describing their fate in this parable. They will not see salvation, instead they will be separated from the wheat, and tossed into the fire of damnation. Thus the last thing the virgins with no oil will hear is,

*“Afterward the other virgins came also, saying,
‘Lord, Lord, open to us! But he answered and said,
Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’”*
(Matthew 25:11-12)

This parable is a great example of today's Church throughout the world. Sadly, not since the very early days, after Pentecost, has the whole church truly represented Jesus Christ. My heart weeps when I consider how shameful the church has become in today's world. represented Christ through the ages. A close examination of what groups like the “World Council of Churches,” television evangelists like Joe Osteen, and others are doing in the name of Christianity is enough to make one realize that Satan has gotten ahold of a large portion of the Christian churches in the world. Yet, we can praise GOD

⁸⁷ Acts 23:6

⁸⁸ Acts 9:1-19

⁸⁹ Matthew 13:24-40

though, because just as HE told Elijah that there was a remnant of true prophets who had not bowed to Baal; so too are there faithful followers of Christ throughout the whole church, filled with the Holy Spirit⁹⁰ who have not bowed down to the influence of Lucifer.

These five wise virgins are our examples of how we should be prepared by having our hearts, minds, and souls prepared for the day our Bridegroom comes. Jesus said to the church of Philadelphia,

“Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.”

(Revelation 3:10)

The Five wise virgins are representative of the true body of Christ. They were ready for Christ, and thus they were found worthy to be His bride and part of His Kingdom. Those who act like the Pharisees Jesus confronted in ch 23, who are walking the walk only for the world to see, but are not truly living the life are woefully unprepared. Christ knows the heart of all men, and that's why the five virgins with no oil will be rejected.

The last part I will cover is a short response to anyone who may wonder about the foolish virgins heading out to purchase oil. Well once the Bridegroom shows up, it's too late. If you are not saved by the time you are to be presented to Christ, there is no more time to do it. Thus the reason the door was closed when they returned. They, we, all of us need to prepare, because like a thief in the night who will not warn you he is coming, so too is the hour you will be taken away. So be prepared.

Many would rather dwell on the analogy of the parable being of the rapture and the end times. Ok, that is fine for them, but I usually stay away from end times scenarios. Mainly because no one knows the hour He will come. Should I be alive when a rapture happens, then I'll be blessed, but to dwell on it loses the emphasis Christ wants us to dwell

⁹⁰ 1 kings 19:16

upon. Which is spreading the Gospel and teaching the sheep how to live a life that is acceptable to Christ.

Jesus shared this parable so we would know that we need to always be ready for HIS return. While I have no problem with pastors, teachers, and others sharing knowledge they feel God has blessed them with on the discussion of eschatology, I myself seldom if ever write on the end times. Instead of getting all tied up in the when, where, and how of the end times, I would rather prepare everyone for the thief in the night. A time when a drunk driver may cross the centerline, or a bolt of lightning will strike in the rain and thus send a brother or sister in Christ to meet HIM a bit earlier than they expected.

Many of us will unexpectedly leave this world, but when it comes time, will you be prepared to meet the Bridegroom? As for me, I plan on having an abundance of oil on hand to be ready. I advise all who read this commentary to have plenty of oil also, because only those who are true children of Christ will have enough oil to make it into the wedding feast.

I pray those who have ears to hear will hear His voice and call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

Who Ascended and Descended?

“Who has ascended into heaven, or descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son’s name, If you know?”
(Proverb 30:4)

Some 900 years before Jesus was born, the author of this Proverb knew that God's Son would appear on earth. A prophecy bound up in a Proverb. Long before the Pharisees would accuse Jesus of blasphemy for equating Himself with God,⁹¹ Agur, the son of Jakeh, knew God's Son would descend from heaven.

We are drawing close to the End of Times, and there is absolutely nothing more important in life than being born again of the Spirit of God; to know that you are saved from eternal death and judgment and that you have an assurance that you are going to heaven because you have been born into His family, into His Kingdom; to be set free from the burden of sin, and be able to experience God's forgiveness, and peace and power.

This has all been freely provided by an unmerited grace through the atoning sacrifice on Calvary of His only begotten Son, Jesus The Christ. This is the Gospel that was proclaimed by the angels at His birth⁹² some 900 years after Agur was moved by the Spirit of God to ask us if we know what His name is. It has since been preached throughout the entire world.

The things that are getting ready to take place on the Earth will shake the whole world and bring about much confusion, fear and

⁹¹ John 10:22-42

⁹² Luke 2:6-21

destruction. Although there are things everyone can do to prepare themselves, there is nothing that will completely protect you from what is coming unless you are protected by the Ark of Salvation that is Christ Jesus. This is why Jesus warned His disciples while He walked with them;

*“And as it was in the days of Noah, so it
will be also in the days of the Son of Man:”*

(Luke 17:26)

In those days, God told Noah to build the ark and gave him a blueprint on how to build it.⁹³ This ark would be the only way humanity could be saved from the horrific cataclysmic flood that was coming upon the earth. The ark was big enough to accommodate 8 people plus all animals of their kind. Noah, a righteous man of God, warned the people for a long time about the coming flood and destruction. Telling them to repent and turn away from sin and join him in the ark.

However, no one paid attention to him. They just continued living in their sins of rebellion and idolatry right up to the moment the flood waters wiped them out. Some estimates put the World's population at about 10 billion people. Yet only 8 were raptured from the destruction Noah warned them about. Jesus used the great flood and the days of Sodom's destruction as examples of how things will be before He returns;

*“Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they
drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but
on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and
brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will
it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.”*

(Luke 17:27-30)

As I said, just as Noah and his family had a life saving ark to escape God's judgment on the world, we too have an Ark that will save us from the judgment of God. This Ark is available to all who believe in Christ

⁹³ Genesis 6:9-22

and repent of their evil ways. Christ Jesus is that Ark of Salvation. Mind you, many claim that there are other ways to gain eternal salvation, but like a boat riddled with holes in the bottom, those ways will only give you a ticket to hell and destruction.

In the last chapter I told you about the parable of the ten virgins, whom Jesus tells us that 5 of them were not properly prepared and had no oil.⁹⁴ The oil is likened to the Spirit of GOD. Unless you have the Spirit of GOD indwelling in your heart, you are no better off than the 10 billion people who were shut out in the rain when GOD closed the door on the ark. These foolish virgins thought they were saved, they even waited for the return, but because they followed a false Gospel, they were not allowed to enter into the wedding feast, and thus were lost, like those of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Do not follow those who teach a false Gospel, because there is but one way to eternal salvation. Salvation is not a religion, it is a Person; Love is not a word, it is a Person; The Way is not a map, it is a Person; Truth and life are not concepts, they are a Person. The name of that Person is the same person the Proverb asks if you know, and that Person is Christ Jesus, who tells us;

“Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

(John 14:6)

I pray those who have ears to hear will hear His voice and call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

⁹⁴ *Matthew 25:1-13*

Chapter 16

You Will Be Hated For My Namesake

After Jesus prophesied that the Temple would be destroyed,⁹⁵ His disciples followed him to the Mount of Olives, and asked Jesus about the things he warned them about.

“Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?”

(Mark 13:4)

As He described the events they must be aware of, He also told them they would be persecuted for following Him. The persecution of those who follow Christ has been well documented throughout the history of the Church. From the very beginning of the Church and through to this day, Christians have and still are being martyred. As I write this, Christians in the Middle East and Africa are experiencing a genocide. Since Stephen was stoned, over 1 billion Christians have been murdered throughout the world. During the years of the Soviet Union under Communism, 15 million Christians were murdered for their faith between 1917 and 1950. For an excellent background on many who died for their faith, may I suggest, “Foxe’s Book of the Martyrs.”⁹⁶

Many Christians in America mistakenly believe they are immune from prosecution, and for years we have had it easy. However, the time has come, and it's already here when Christians are being persecuted for His namesake. For no other reason than Satan's minions have the

⁹⁵ Mark 13:1-2

⁹⁶ Foxe's Book of Martyrs - 1563, Author, John Foxe, John Day Publishing England

(Foxe wrote his book in tribute to Christian martyrs, beginning with Stephen, the first believer who died for the cause of Christ. He died while working on a Latin commentary of Revelation with his son, Samuel Foxe on April 18, 1587)

power, and like their father the devil, they hate everything about Christ Jesus.

"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved."

(Matthew 24:9-13)

Up until recent times, most Christians in America could not imagine living in a country where such things would happen in their lifetime. Who would ever imagine a time when Christians would be hated and people would betray their faith for the false prophets? I can't help but think of folks who grew up in the Bible belt or of the Laura Ingalls-type pioneers of the 19th century prairie days. Did they ever come close to imagining what that kind of world would be like? And yet here we are, actually living in such times.

It's not just imaginary anymore, because we now have elected officials who have actually been pushing legislation that could outlaw the Bible due to hate speech. I have no doubt that by adding this commentary to my book, that it will one day be banned from the public, along with other Christian related material.

In some states the supporters of the administration have gone to court to stop Christians from attending church over illnesses created in labs by humans. If only NERO could have had the ability to create a virus like China did. He could have stopped Christianity in its tracks almost 2000 years ago. All he could do was start a fire and blame it in Christians.

If the current political climate continues to spiral out of control, then pastors could one day be arrested and prosecuted for preaching against immorality, like some are in Canada as I write this book. Satan has already been using LGBTQ friendly politicians to promote the teaching

of homosexuality in elementary public schools and even in preschools to children as young as 5 years old. Now politicians are pushing to legalize the practice of children as young as 5 years old to decide if they want to change their sex from one gender to another. High schools and universities across the country are allowing men who claim they feel like a woman to compete athletically in women's sports.

We knew it was but a matter of time before the United States government would begin persecuting Christians for things we teach from Scriptures. That moment could now be closer than anyone thought possible just a few years ago. I could face fines and imprisonment for writing about the many topics I do. Whether it be Political or religious, I am on the wrong side of Satan's agenda. I was recently forced to pay for a website to be constructed, because my free blog with Google Blogspot was being censored. A couple Months ago they unpublished some Bible commentaries I wrote over 5 years ago. However, I will never stop writing nor standing up for the things God tells me to stand up for.

This is real, this is now. Jesus Christ knew that this day would come, and he spoke of it when He walked among us. We are living during a time when we will see attacks on Christians escalate as it has in Canada, because of newly adopted hate crime language in the law. It is clear to me that we must be ready to stand up and fight for what is right. We must stand up for our Christian principles in our communities and with our friends and family. A famous Irish-British statesman is quoted as saying,

*"All that is necessary for evil to
succeed is that good men do nothing."*
(Edmund Burke)

Well we now live at a time when evil abounds, and it's incumbent upon Godly men to stand up for what is right, regardless of what the ramifications may be. Sharing the Gospel means to share the light with those in the dark, and that means we must stand up for the truth. We stand on the shoulders of Christian giants who gave their all so that all

could have the chance at salvation. I would advise all my Christian brothers and sisters to remove that lamp shade so that your light can shine brightly onto those who are living in the darkness of this world.

I pray those who have ears to hear will hear His voice and call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

From Dispirited Unbelieving Followers, to Believers Unto Death

Almost 2000 years ago 12 men abandoned their beloved leader in HIS hour of need. While one would betray HIM with a kiss for 30 pieces of silver, the rest scattered after HE was arrested, scourged, and lifted like a snake in the desert. For three years they hung on HIS every Word as He taught them while healing lepers, paraplegics, giving sight to the blind, untying the tongues of the mute, and giving hope to the lost. They even witnessed HIM bringing back to life a friend, whose body was so dead it smelled of rotting flesh.

“Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, “Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days.” Jesus said to her, “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?” Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.” Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth!” And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Loose him, and let him go.”

(John 11:39-45)

Many, if not all of Jesus’ disciples, were good Jewish boys who attended classes where they were taught about the Torah and the prophets; so they would have known about the three times a prophet

raised someone from the dead in Israel's past. However, in every one of those incidents, the dead were raised within 24 hours of their demise. The first time was when Elijah brought a widow's son back to life.⁹⁷ The second time it was when his disciple, Elisha, raised the Shunammite woman's son from the dead.⁹⁸ Then there was the time a dead man's body was put into Elisha's tomb, and the very moment the man's body touched Elisha's bones he came back to life.

"Then Elisha died, and they buried him. And the raiding bands from Moab invaded the land in the spring of the year. So it was, as they were burying a man, that suddenly they spied a band of raiders; and they put the man in the tomb of Elisha; and when the man was let down and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet."
(2 kings 13:20-21)

So when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, after he had been in the tomb for four days, they should have known HE could bring himself back to life also. However, they still didn't understand the lesson Jesus taught them about the sign of the prophet Jonah.

"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."
(Matthew 12:40)

Without a doubt, the most difficult battle Christians face in walking with Jesus, is our lack of faith. Unless we truly understand how to walk in faith, we will continue to struggle with the concept that our battle is a spiritual one. Ultimately, unless we have the faith of a mustard seed, we will continue to struggle with many things Jesus taught. This is the situation the disciples found themselves in when Jesus told them they must learn to forgive a brother who trespassed against them, regardless of how many times they have done so.

⁹⁷ 1 Kings 16:17-24

⁹⁸ 2 Kings 4:18-37

“Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.”

(Luke 17:3-4)

For the Jews, it was a major departure from the teachings of the Pharisees to just automatically forgive someone for their trespasses. The very idea was difficult for them to grasp, because they strongly felt prone to harboring resentments. This is why they felt like the act of continually forgiving others for trespassing against them, required an additional increase in their faith to be able to comply with this radical new concept:

“And the apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith.” So the Lord said, “If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you”

(Luke 15:5-6)

Many of the lessons Jesus taught the disciples had to do with true faith; so by them requesting HIM to increase their faith, we see how they were beginning to understand the true power of Jesus. Many years later, the author of Hebrews would tell us that true strength comes from Jesus, and this is why HE is called the “Author and Finisher” of our faith:

“looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

(Heb 12:2)

Jesus spent three years teaching HIS followers many things, yet time and time again they struggled with understanding the full ramifications of the spiritual battles they would wage. Paul tells us that we do not war against flesh and blood, but rather against spiritual wickedness. This is

why we need to start our day by putting on the full armor of GOD. This armor protects us, while giving us the tools we need to fight the spiritual battles which will ultimately strengthen our faith.

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”
(Ephesians 6:10-13)

While our battle is a spiritual one, it can lead to some physical dangers. In the case of Jesus, the spiritual battle led to HIS physical death. When we are facing a battle, we must always be ready to fight. Yet, the followers of Jesus are not alone in their moment of weakness. Many godly men have turned cowardly in the face of danger due to their lack of faith at times. Consider how Elijah ran away in fear of Jezebel after his bold stance against four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal.⁹⁹

“Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.” And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.”
(1 Kings 19:2-3)

Even men we consider to be brave enough to go to war, oftentimes suffer from lack of courage. When GOD called Gideon to do battle, Gideon brought more men than he needed. GOD wanted to show them that HE fights their battles, not them. The first ones GOD told Gideon to send away were those too afraid to fight.

⁹⁹ 1 Kings 18:20-46

"Now therefore, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, 'Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead.' " And twenty-two thousand of the people returned, and ten thousand remained."

(Judges 7:2-3)

You probably thought that Jesus would have chosen men who would be different. After all, they were chosen by the expert who knows men, GOD. These men pledged their allegiance to their leader; yet within hours before HE would be betrayed by Judas, Jesus tells them they will abandon him. This is when Peter promised to lay down his own life for him, only to be told by Jesus that he would deny HIM three times before the rooster crows, and he did.

"Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I WILL STRIKE THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK WILL BE SCATTERED.'"

(Matthew 26:31)

"Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward." Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake." Jesus answered him, "Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times."

(John 13:36-38)

Well something went wrong, or so HIS followers thought. You see, had they truly listened to His teachings they would know that everything was going as planned from the beginning of time. Five times Jesus either told them outright, or alluded to his arrest, persecution, and death at the hands of HIS enemies.

“From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!” But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are [an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”

(Matthew 16:21-23)

“Then they departed from there and passed through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know it. For He taught His disciples and said to them, “The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day.” But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him.”

(Mark 9:30-32)

“Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.” But they understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken.”

(Luke 18:31-34)

“But Jesus said, “Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.”

(John 12:7-8)

It's difficult to predict how one will respond when the chips are down, but after three years of witnessing miracles few men in history have ever before seen, you would think they would be the last ones to

desert their leader in His time of need. It was assuredly a time when their faith in Him was tested, and they failed Him. Or maybe they abandoned HIM because their own leader Himself seemed so willing to surrender to the inevitable.

“When those around Him saw what was going to happen, they said to Him, “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?” And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus answered and said, “Permit even this.” And He touched his ear and healed him.”

(Luke 22:49-50)

Later we will learn they even succumbed to the idea that they were mistaken about Him being the promised Redeemer. After all, most Jews were under the impression that the Messiah would raise up an army to take on Rome and defeat them as King David did with the Philistines and others. Instead, they were dispirited and afraid that they too would be arrested, scourged and crucified as heretics like HE was. We even learn from a conversation HE had with a couple of HIS followers, that they believed they were mistaken about who HE was. They admitted this to a Stranger that they lost their faith in HIM.

“Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days? “The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel.”

(Luke 24:18-21)

Following the death of Jesus, His followers were lost sheep without a shepherd. Yet something had to turn this band of dispirited followers into believers unto death. The fact remains, the only thing that changed, was the realization that Jesus had risen from the dead. As I stated, they totally missed the lesson Jesus gave them about Jonah, otherwise they

would not be so dispirited. For surely, if the Gospel taught to them by Jesus was based only upon His teachings, the miracles He performed, and His death on the cross, then the Gospel was a lie. For as Paul told the Corinthians,

“For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.”

(1 Corinthians 15:16-19)

It's human nature to follow a courageous man who leads by example, because most men are not fighters on their own, they are followers. Men need someone to follow, someone to embolden them, someone to give them a reason to believe that this movement is different. We see it in sports, politics, war, and yes even in religion. History is replete with great movements that faltered when the leader went down. Even the great Jewish teacher Gamaliel, whom Paul of Tarsus was trained under, stated as much to the Council when Peter and the apostles were arrested and brought before them.

“After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God.”

(Acts 5:37-39)

During Jesus' ministry, the disciples witnessed first hand how HE confronted, with wisdom and truth, those who would do HIM harm. They saw Him speak like no other. One who spoke with authority, and lived by the standards He set forth. It took false accusations and a violation of Religious laws to persecute and crucify Him, and while

they thought they dispelled the idea that Jesus was some sort of a Messiah, something turned this band of dispirited followers into believers unto death. That something was the proof of His resurrection, which sealed the deal for His disciples.

Never again would they cower in fear, never again would they desert the One who died for their sins, and never again would they question His deity. In time they would all be persecuted to some degree, and other than John they would all die a martyr's death. They now understood in full the teachings of Jesus, and with that conviction they would go forward and spread the Gospel to all nations as they truly learned how to sacrifice their all for the ONE who sacrificed it all for them. They finally believed Jesus was who they thought HE was before HE was arrested, scourged, and crucified. Now, they know HE would always be with them, even to the end of the age.

I pray that those who have ears to hear will hear His voice and call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

What follows is excerpts from John Foxe's "Book Of The Martyrs" published in 1563. Other than the death of Judas', which the Scriptures tell us of how he died, the following is the best account we have of how the other 11 disciples died. Those who abandoned him, would die heroic deaths defending the faith.

James the Great - According to St. Luke, in the History of the Apostles' Acts, was James the son of Zebedee, the elder brother of John, and a relative of our Lord; for his mother Salome was cousin-german to the Virgin Mary. It was not until ten years after the death of Stephen that the second martyrdom took place; for no sooner had Herod Agrippa been appointed governor of Judea, than, with a view to ingratiate himself with them, he raised a sharp persecution against the Christians, and determined to make an effectual blow, by striking at their leaders. The account given us by an eminent primitive

writer, Clemens Alexandrinus, ought not to be overlooked; that, as James was led to the place of martyrdom, his accuser was brought to repent of his conduct by the apostle's extraordinary courage and undauntedness, and fell down at his feet to request his pardon, professing himself a Christian, and resolving that James should not receive the crown of martyrdom alone. Hence they were both beheaded at the same time. Thus did the first apostolic martyr cheerfully and resolutely receive that cup, which he had told our Savior he was ready to drink. Timon and Parmenas suffered martyrdom about the same time; the one at Philippi, and the other in Macedonia. These events took place A.D. 44.

Philip - Was born at Bethsaida, in Galilee and was first called by the name of "disciple." He labored diligently in Upper Asia, and suffered martyrdom at Heliopolis, in Phrygia. He was scourged, thrown into prison, and afterwards crucified, A.D. 54.

Matthew - Whose occupation was that of a toll-gatherer, was born at Nazareth. He wrote his gospel in Hebrew, which was afterwards translated into Greek by James the Less. The scene of his labors was Parthia, and Ethiopia, in which latter country he suffered martyrdom, being slain with a halberd (ax/spear) in the city of Nadabah, A.D. 60.

James the Less - Is supposed by some to have been the brother of our Lord, by a former wife of Joseph. This is very doubtful, and accords too much with the Catholic superstition, that Mary never had any other children except our Savior. He was elected to the oversight of the churches of Jerusalem; and was the author of the Epistle ascribed to James in the sacred canon. At the age of ninety-four he was beaten and stoned by the Jews; and finally had his brains dashed out with a fuller's club.

Andrew - Was the brother of Peter. He preached the gospel to many Asiatic nations; but on his arrival at Edessa he was taken and crucified on a cross, the two ends of which were fixed transversely in the ground. Hence the derivation of the term, St. Andrew's Cross.

Peter - Among many other saints, the blessed apostle Peter was condemned to death, and crucified, as some do write, at Rome; albeit

some others, and not without cause, do doubt thereof. Hegesippus saith that Nero sought matter against Peter to put him to death; which, when the people perceived, they entreated Peter with much ado that he would fly the city. Peter, through their importunity at length persuaded, prepared himself to avoid. But, coming to the gate, he saw the Lord Christ come to meet him, to whom he, worshipping, said, "Lord, whither dost Thou go?" To whom He answered and said, "I am come again to be crucified." By this, Peter, perceiving his suffering to be understood, returned into the city. Jerome saith that he was crucified, his head being down and his feet upward, himself so requiring, because he was (he said) unworthy to be crucified after the same form and manner as the Lord was.

Jude - The brother of James, was commonly called Thaddeus. He was crucified at Edessa, A.D. 72.

Bartholomew - Preached in several countries, and having translated the Gospel of Matthew into the language of India, he propagated it in that country. He was at length cruelly beaten and then crucified by the impatient idolaters.

Thomas - Called Didymus, preached the Gospel in Parthia and India, where, exciting the rage of the pagan priests, he was martyred by being thrust through with a spear.

Simon - Surnamed Zelotes, preached the Gospel in Mauritania, Africa, and even in Britain, in which latter country he was crucified, A.D. 74.

John - The "beloved disciple," was brother to James the Great. The churches of Smyrna, Pergamos, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, and Thyatira, were founded by him. From Ephesus he was ordered to be sent to Rome, where it is affirmed he was cast into a cauldron of boiling oil. He escaped by miracle, without injury. Domitian afterwards banished him to the Isle of Patmos, where he wrote the Book of Revelation. Nerva, the successor of Domitian, recalled him. He was the only apostle who escaped a violent death.

The Way You Treat An Animal Reveals Your Heart

*A righteous man regards the life of his animal,
But the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.*

(Proverb 12:10)

Back in 2013, two days after Christmas, I had to have our beloved 18 year old dog Hershee, euthanized. Her kidneys had shut down and she was in so much pain she could not even settle down for more than five minutes at a time. So the merciful thing to do was to end her life.

It's easy to talk about it now, but at the time it was very difficult emotionally for both my wife and I. Hershee had lived a good long life, but at 18 her time with us was up. We have no children, so Hershee filled a void for us both. She was after all a member of our family, and our hearts were heavy.

Maybe this should not be so, I mean after all, she was just a dog. But, whether we choose to accept it or not, Hershee felt like she was one of us, and we treated her as if we would treat any member of our family. We were her "pack" so to speak, and I trust that she felt herself a valuable member of that pack. She always ate good when we ate good, seemed happy when we were happy and always tried to do her part, even if it was just to bark and growl at people she didn't know. In return, we showered her with affection and praise. Treating her with snacks, leftovers, long walks, and we even took her on special trips to the park or lake just for her to enjoy the outdoors. Our time with her will live forever in our hearts and memories, just as they would if she were a human child.

What did we get out of this relationship? The same thing she got from us but more-so. Medical science tells us that pet owners have lower blood pressure, lower cholesterol levels, a higher survival rate after serious illness, fewer doctor visits, reduced loneliness, less depression, and stress. Studies have also shown that children who grow up with animals on farms, or just as pets, are generally more healthy physically and physiologically, along with being better prepared for adulthood.

We now know that soldiers who come home from war have an easier time re-adjusting to civilian life if they have a pet, just as the elderly do better if they have a pet they can care for and talk to when they are living alone. Nursing homes and hospitals, where people have few if any visitors, would be wise to recognize the benefits animals have on a person's health and healing potential.

God knew this when He created us. I believe that is why both man and land dwelling animals were created on the 6th day of the week. Whereas He created all air and water animals on the 5th day of the week. Oh I am sure some will challenge me on this, because we all know someone who is very attached to a bird or other creation of God, maybe you are one of them. I speak in a general sense of course, not in a dogmatic way. (pun intended) After all, there is always an exception to any rule or theory.

However, if you look at the animal world, only the land animals seem to have a nature about them that accepts man as part of their pack. When I read about the beasts or animals in Scripture, I believe it is speaking of animals of the field, cows, sheep, goats etc. Any land animal that is useful to man, and it is these types of animals that God created for man's use in survival. Scriptures tell us about the relationship between man and beast. Solomon wrote,

"A righteous man regards the life of his animal,"
(Proverb 12:10a)

One of the characteristics of a Godly person is mercy, and a man of God shows no cruelty to anything. A man's benevolence extends to

even the fiercest most dangerous animals on the planet. A man of God has a heart of love for both man and beast, and always considers what's best for them. God Himself gave us the example of how we should treat the animals that work hard for us when He told us;

*“You shall not muzzle an ox
while it treads out the grain”*
(Deuteronomy 25:4)

After all, How would you like to slave away at something and reap no benefit from it? Thus the Oxen should also share in the fruit of its labors just as humans should. In His Ten Commandments, God also decreed that animals should be given a day off from work as He did for man.

*“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days
you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh
day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you
shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter,
nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor
your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates.”*
(Exodus 20:8-10)

While Scripture expresses a clear priority for human life over animal life, animals are part of God's creation and thus we are to show proper care and humane treatment towards them. When He was going to heal a man's withered hand in a synagogue on the Sabbath, the Pharisees thought to catch him breaking the law of working on the Sabbath. So Jesus asked them a question;

*“What man is there among you who has one sheep,
and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will
not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much
more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore
it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”*
(Matthew 12:11-12)

I truly believe that God placed animals in our lives so that we can learn the principle of loving your servants just as God loves us. When it comes to dogs, I believe God put inside them a special love for us that He wants us to have for Him. Ever see a Dog in a car or truck patiently waiting for the leader of their pack to return? My wife told me that when she waited in the van for me to make a quick trip into the store, that the dogs sat looking at the door I went into. If anyone got in their way, they would move from side to side to see that door again. They love me so much, they couldn't help but stare at that door until I came out.

This is the same way the disciples stood watching the clouds where Jesus went up. They loved Jesus with all their hearts and souls, and they wanted to wait till their Master reappeared. This is the same way a dog treats their master; thus, a lesson God gives us through our pets. Do you love God the way they love you? Are you waiting with baited breath for our Lord to return, or have you already forgotten about Him?

“Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

(Acts 1:9-11)

Mankind is to animals what God is to mankind? Yes, there is almost no limit to the number of places in Scripture that show that man and animal are inseparable, our futures are intertwined. They are our companions, our helpers, our comforters, our food, and even until Christ died on the cross, they were our sacrifices to GOD for our sins. Here are a few Scriptures which show a virtually identical treatment of both man and animal:

“Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man.”

(Genesis 9:5)

“This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you.”

(Exodus 12:12)

“Consecrate to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast; it is Mine.”

(Exodus 13:2)

“And it came to pass, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the Lord killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all males that open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.”

(Exodus 13:15)

“I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are on the ground, by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and have given it to whom it seemed proper to Me. And now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the beasts of the field I have also given him to serve him.”

(Jeremiah 27:5-6)

*“Your righteousness is like the great mountains;
Your judgments are a great deep;
O Lord, You preserve man and beast.”*

(Psalm 36:6)

“For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity.”

(Ecclesiastes 13:19)

“We are then told by Solomon in the second part of the Proverb this commentary is based upon;

But the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.”

(Proverb 12:10 (b))

The Hebrew word used for cruel in the last example is, אֲכִזִּי akzârîy. Which translates to violent, without mercy, ruthless. A person who treats an animal or another human in such a way, is like the one who influences them, Satan. They can show no other disposition than what is in their master. When an evil person appears to be merciful, it's but a facade which they use to cover their true purposes of cruelty. To get what they desire, evil will wear any mask that helps them attain their goal. For humans like that, the end justifies the means, in other words, anything they do is justified in their hearts as a way to get what they want. To them, it's like walking down the street, because their heart has become so callous they are clueless to the reality of their actions. They speak mercifully, extol benevolence, sometimes even give to the poor, but Solomon also warns of them in this Proverb about accepting things from humans like that when he wrote,

“When you sit down to eat with a ruler, Consider carefully what is before you; And put a knife to your throat If you are a man given to appetite. Do not desire his delicacies, For they are deceptive food.”

(Proverbs 23:1-3)

During the Great Depression, the Chicago gangster Al Capone, would set up soup kitchens to get the people on his side against the law. After all, if he were ever charged with a crime and brought to trial, it was these individuals who would sit on the jury. Yet, if any of those individuals got on the wrong side of Capone, they would be swimming with fish wearing cement shoes. Capone was an evil man who used other men and women to satisfy his greedy desires. This is no different than those who own certain types of dogs, for the purpose of pitting

them against other dogs in fights to make money. Former NFL quarterback Michael Vick, who played for the Atlanta Falcons in the 1990's comes to mind. He loved his dogs, and gave them the best food while also caressing and petting them. He was even known to parade his dogs around and brag about them. Until they lost a fight, then he would complain about the bullet he had to waist to kill them.

The type of animal makes no difference, men will treat roosters the same way for cock fights as they do bulls for bull fights. In the same way a man's heart will lead them to treat an animal, they will also treat other humans the same way to advance their own selfish desires. Look how pimps treat their women like queens, until they step out of line, or become too old and used up. Just as gladiators were treated in the days of the Roman Empire, they lived like royalty with all the perks of a champion, until they were killed by a better gladiator. OH they would grieve for the loss, but only because of the money they will now lose.

To better understand this type of person, you need to know that they possess no compassion, because the godless is compassionless. Which is the direct opposite of compassion. Unless they allow Christ into their heart, they will live a life that altogether shows no compassion. Something that was said about serial killers like Ted Bundy, John Wayne Gacey, the BTK killer and others.

Those with no conscience have no remorse for the cruelty they inflict on others, let alone animals. Interestingly, many serial killers even start off by torturing and killing small animals as teens. They just progress to larger animals, and in their minds humans are no different than animals. They have no love for man and no belief in God. Even their tender touches are acts of cruelty, because those caresses, hugs, and kisses are but a prelude to the evil that is about to be unleashed. Just like the fame and fortune that Lucifer offered Christ, it would have come only with the result of eternal destruction. That is all evil can do, offer something that is fleeting.

This is the type of mercy and love that too many animals in the world suffer under. God cares greatly for the animals He has created. Yes, even an animal that is killed in a hunt for food. Whether it be a

bird, a fish, or a deer, It should be put to death in a merciless way. Not slowly so that it's suffering is prolonged, but rather as quickly as possible so they do not suffer. I know many men who hunt, and they hone their skills so they can kill the animal as quickly as possible. They understand that the animal is a life, and GOD allows us to take that life for our sustenance.

Those who seek to follow God's ways will care about all of His creation, including animal life. Animal cruelty, the neglect of pets, and the wanton destruction of a species is a sin. Christians are called to care for animals, thus expressing the same attitude toward animal life as our Creator has.

I pray those who have ears to hear will hear His voice and call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

Jonah The Prodigal Prophet

The book of Jonah has many lessons for God's children to learn, but I wish to touch upon the subject of being obedient to GOD's calling in our life. To begin with, one needs to truly understand the situation from Jonah's view point in sending Jonah on his trip to Nineveh.

The year was sometime between 800 and 750 B.C. Which would have been approximately 170 years after the division of Israel into two kingdoms. While Nineveh was the most populated city in the world at the time, it would not be the capital of the Neo-Assyrian empire for some 50 years. It was a time when the Assyrian Empire was just entering the zenith of its power, and Nineveh was the trading hub of the known civilized world. Thus everything went through Nineveh.

It was already an ancient city that was founded by the great hunter, Nimrod. The man who built the Tower of Babel in rebellion against GOD some 3400-years earlier. A metropolis that reigned supreme until 612 B.C., when it was sacked during a civil war by a coalition of Babylonians, Medes, Persians, Scythians, and Cimmerians. They attacked their capital city of Nineveh in 612 B.C., marking the end of the Neo-Assyrian empire.

When you consider how cruel the Ninevites treated their enemies, you will better understand Jonah's hatred for them. The cruel practices the Assyrians used on their enemies should conjure up the atrocities committed by the Nazis during WWII. Even then, the NAZI's were not as cruel as the Ninevites were. Assyrian records attest to the evil things the Ninevites did to those they conquered. There was no act of cruelty which these conquerors had not employed! The inscriptions and the pictorial evidence provide detailed information regarding the Assyrian

treatment of conquered peoples, their armies and their rulers. In his official royal inscriptions, Ashurnasirpal II calls himself the,

*“trampler of all enemies ... who defeated all his enemies
[and] hung the corpses of his enemies on posts.”*

The treatment of captured enemies often depended on their readiness to submit themselves to the will of the Assyrian king. In one case, when a city resisted as long as possible instead of immediately submitting, Ashurnasirpal proudly records his punishment,

“I flayed as many nobles as had rebelled against me [and] I flayed their skin while they lived, and left them to rot in the baking sun. I hung men on stakes I erected on the piles of the dead ... I tortured them right through my land [and] draped their skins over the walls. Their women and daughters I abused in front of their men before slaughtering them. I then gouged the men’s eyes and took them as slave laborers and entertainment for the citizens.”

The account was intended not only to describe what had happened, but to also frighten anyone who might dare to resist his rule. HE had scribes write about the things he was called by his gods to do, as a way to suppress his enemies in battle and punished the disobedient subjects of the lands he conquered,

“In strife and conflict I besieged [and] conquered the city. I felled 3,000 of their fighting men with the sword ... I captured many troops alive: I cut off of some their arms [and] hands; I cut off of others their noses, ears, [and] extremities. I gouged out the eyes of many troops. I made one pile of the living [and] one of heads. I hung their heads on trees around the city.”

After they visited these horrors upon the populace of the conquered cities, they proudly carried home body parts of their enemies leaders as souvenirs of war.

We read that King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon wasn’t much better, because he killed Zedekiah’s sons in front of him before blinding

him.¹⁰⁰ Opposing generals would get even worse treatment, as the Babylonians would also flay them alive as the Ninevites did, and let them bleed out like a hunter would do a deer. It seems like history repeats itself, because even the kings of England would cut the bodies of rebels and opposing warriors into pieces and send the body parts to others as a warning to all who would dare challenge their ruler.

In Jonah's day, Nineveh was feared among all its enemies. You can understand why most Israelites prayed that GOD would visit upon them the same punishment He did for Sodom and Gomorrah. Mind you, it's a great honor to be chosen by God to be a leader, or in Jonah's case a prophet of God. However, with positions of authority comes the responsibility of carrying out certain tasks we may not like. So when God called upon Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach a message of repentance to the people, you can understand why he was so reluctant to do so.¹⁰¹

I wager a guess that Jonah may very well have had friends or relatives who were victims of the Ninevites atrocities. After all, the Assyrians have been enemies of Israel¹⁰² since the time of Judges. King David finally defeated them and put garrisons in Damascus, as the Syrians would become David's servants, and even bring tribute to him.

Thus, when God called Jonah to warn the Ninevites of God's impending wrath, he was very reluctant. By the time Jonah was born, it was becoming common for GOD's people to pray for the promised messiah to come and defeat their enemies like David did. So when GOD called Jonah to preach repentance to the people of Nineveh, his desire was to see the city destroyed and Assyria's empire reduced to ashes.

Well Jonah decided that instead of going to Nineveh, he would purchase a ticket to board a boat that was going the opposite direction, because he wanted nothing to do with carrying out his appointed task. Eventually, we will learn that Jonah was so full of hatred for the

¹⁰⁰ 2 Kings 25:6-7

¹⁰¹ Jonah 1:1-3

¹⁰² 2 Kings 8:1-14

Ninevites, that his biggest fear was not the harm he would be in, but rather that they would accept GOD's offer and repent. He hated that GOD would show mercy to these evil heathens, who would then be free to plunder and pillage Israel again.¹⁰³

In Jonah's journey to flee from the task God had given him, he ended up on a boat that was caught in a storm. This storm was so bad that it threatened the very lives of all on board. Eventually Jonah confessed to the sailors that he was fleeing God and that they would only live if they threw him overboard. At first they refused and attempted to row their way through the storm, but it just got worse. Eventually they reluctantly threw Jonah overboard into the raging sea while asking God to forgive them for doing so. The storm let up, the sea became calm and almost immediately Jonah was swallowed by a whale, where he would spend the next three days.

An interesting thing happened due to Jonah being on that boat. Something besides the storm, and the men tossing him into the sea. After Jonah was tossed overboard and the storm stopped, the sailors took vows to the ONE true GOD. So while Jonah was abdicating his responsibility, GOD did use him to reach these men. Consider how many people these men would come in touch with through their lives. Always recounting the story about the man of GOD they tossed into the sea. Only GOD knows how many have eventually come to accept GOD because of this incident. Even in moments when we are disobedient to GOD, HE may use us to reach others.

“Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows.”

(Jonah 1:15-16)

Eventually Jonah repented and God had the whale regurgitate him up onto the shore, and Jonah headed to Nineveh to preach repentance. To Jonah's chagrin, the whole city repented and Nineveh experienced a spiritual revival. As I stated in the beginning of this commentary, there

¹⁰³ Jonah 4:1-2

are a few different lessons that can be learned from Jonah. Probably the biggest would come some 800 years later when Jesus taught about His death and resurrection.

“But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.”
(Matthew 12:39-41)

However, my focus is more about the way God sent Jonah to preach to a people that he detested, a people who had spent the last hundred and seventy years trying to annihilate the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, and how it pertains to us in our obedient walk with Christ.

God often calls us to do things we feel we are either not ready for, or maybe unwilling to do. However, we must trust in the ONE who knows us better than we know ourselves. When we trust the Holy Spirit we will eventually see that GOD is right, and if that means we are called to go to San Francisco and preach to the militant homosexual community, then so be it. The question for many Christians is, would you go to San Francisco if God called you to go? What would you do if God called you to go to the Middle East to preach to the Muslims? How about being told to head to the mountains of Afghanistan to share the Gospel with the Taliban? Maybe God would call you to go preach to the gang members hanging around the streets of Southern LA.

In essence, God called Jonah to preach to a people bent on the annihilation of his country. For me, and most Americans, the Taliban is the last people on earth we want to evangelize to, and our thoughts and feelings for them are probably real close to the thoughts and feelings Jona had for the Assyrians at Nineveh. These are questions Jonah must have had. However, God loves everyone, and he does not wish for even

one soul to perish. Just as GOD forgave those who crucified HIM, so too must we forgive those who transgress against us, and pray that those we transgress against will forgive us.

“Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” And they divided His garments and cast lots.”

(Luke 23:34)

“And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors.”

(Matthew 6:12)

Jonah knew that if he preached to the Ninevites, there was a possibility they would repent. He also knew that God was gracious and merciful and HE would spare them. So when they did repent, this reluctant prophet was angry, because he would rather see them destroyed. However, even though he ran away from his calling, he has more faith than many of us do. Why? Well, Jonah didn't run away because he worried about what they would do to him. He had faith that God would protect him.

How many can honestly say that if God sent you into a den of thieves and cutthroats that there was a good chance you would survive long enough to even give them the message to repent? Jonah's problem wasn't that he had little faith. His problem was that he hated the Ninevites so much that he would rather see them all die and sent to hell with no chance of forgiveness from God.

Me? I have little faith the Taliban would let me live, let alone repent. However, I do want them to accept Christ and be saved, I just don't want to be the one to go into their lair with the message. So, that actually makes me worse than Jonah, because he eventually went. Me? I'm living comfortably in a cozy home in America, with no fear of being beheaded by the Taliban. Lord, forgive me for my weak faith and cowardliness. If only I had the boldness of Paul who requested an audience with the Emperor in Rome, so that he could share the Gospel with Nero himself.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Acts 25:9-12

The lesson I would like you to get from Jonah today is that we are called to help those who are lost to be found, those who are blind to see, and those who are deaf to hear.¹⁰⁵ We are all called to share the good news with all the nations. Not just with those that have friendly governments, or with the people we like, but even with those we are sure would rather see us dead.

Who knows, maybe we too will be used by God to begin a revival. One which has not been seen since the day a reluctant prodigal prophet was regurgitated from the belly of a whale. Jesus told us just before he ascended into heaven,

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

(Matthew 28:19-21)

I pray those who have ears to hear will hear His voice and call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

¹⁰⁵ Matthew 11:1-5

The More Things Change, The More They Stay The Same

As I started reading Habakkuk during one of my morning quiet times, I was given some insight I have not considered before. The phrase, "The more things change, the more they stay the same," often comes to my mind as I read the words of ancient prophets. Yet this time it made me consider the events of today's world more than usual.

As I prepared to read Habakkuk, I did my usual study on the times of his calling, and was reminded that he was a contemporary of Jeremiah around 640 to 600 B.C. It was a time when Babylon was reaching its pinnacle of power as an empire. During their lifetimes, King Nebuchadnezzar would destroy both Jerusalem and Solomon's Temple, while taking GOD's people away into captivity. It would be 70 years before GOD's people would return to the promised land.

Like then, the people and the governments of today have become so wicked that we would be hard pressed to claim the world has changed much from 2600 years ago, when these two prophets gave us a glimpse of what the people and the government were like. Jeremiah wrote that the people had become wicked in GOD's eyes, while Habbakkuk informs us as to how corrupt the government of the Southern Kingdom of Judah had become.

*"Your own wickedness will correct you, And your
backslidings will rebuke you. Know therefore and see
that it is an evil and bitter thing That you have
forsaken the LORD your God, And the fear of Me is
not in you," Says the Lord GOD of hosts."*

(Jeremiah 2:19)

“The burden which the prophet Habakkuk saw. “O LORD, how long shall I cry, And You will not hear? Even cry out to You, “Violence!” And You will not save. Why do You show me iniquity, And cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; There is strife, and contention arises. Therefore the law is powerless, And justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore perverse judgment proceeds”

(Habakkuk 1:2-4)

The world is so wicked today, that Christians often times repeat the words of Jesus when HE said,

“And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man:”

(Luke 17:26)

Both Jeremoah and Habakkuk began their ministries during the reign of King Josiah. A king that Scriptures tells, “did what was right in the sight of GOD.”

“And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.”

(2 Chronicles 34:2)

However, his sons, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah were evil and did not follow in the steps of Josiah their father. Instead they did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.

Jehoahaz

“And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done.”

(2 Kings 23:32)

Jehoiakim

“And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done.”

(2 Kings 23:37)

Jehoiachin

*“And he did evil in the sight of the LORD,
according to all that his father had done.”*

(2 kings 24:9)

Zedekiah

*“He also did evil in the sight of the LORD,
according to all that Jehoiakim had done.”*

(2 kings 24:19)

So after Josiah died, his descendants, their cronies, and even the religious leaders allowed evil to abound while righteousness was attacked. It should make the reader seriously look at the way the United States, and many countries around the world, are today. Between Jeremiah revealing the wickedness of the people, and Habakkuk telling us how evil the government was, we get a good picture of how the more things change, the more they stay the same.

Another difference between these two prophets was how Habakkuk's concerns were much more philosophical than those of Jeremiah. Habakkuk was disturbed by the way our sovereign Lord was not responding to the evil generation and its internal injustices. Like in Jeremiah and Habakkuk's day, we Christians see the evil in both the people and the corruption of our government. We pray for GOD to intervene so that justice and righteousness will prevail, only to see things getting more and more evil as time goes by. Is it any wonder so many ask why GOD will not respond to our prayers for justice?

Like then, GOD's people today feel the brunt of the persecution dealt out by Satan's minions who seem to have control of every aspect of our society. Back then the Lord told both prophets that He was raising up a nation that would punish His people for their covenant unfaithfulness. Today we see some of the most evil and vile people on the planet gaining the upper hand over us. Many have an uneasy feeling that GOD has turned His back upon us by allowing our ways of life to

be taken over by some of the most vile and evil people in history. What we see as good, they call evil, and what we know is evil, they proclaim to be righteous and good. 100 years earlier Isaiah warned GOD's people of their evil hearts when he wrote;

“Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, And prudent in their own sight!”

(Isaiah 5:20-21)

This could easily be said to us today, because our future seems no brighter than that of the citizens of Jeremiah and Habakkuk's day. We can all see the writing on the wall, and we don't need Daniel's translation to tell us what it means. Our destruction is set in stone, because the decay of the nation today is deeper and more infectious than any of us could have imagined just thirty years ago.

When evil abounds in the people, it's usually an easy thing to see. It's also usually too late to fix the problem when the evil is so easily recognizable. Like an injured leg that has gangrene set in, the only cure is a complete amputation. Yet even the best of us are unwilling to decapitate the limbs that are in control of our own destruction. So instead of making the hard choice and severing the infected limb, we continue to go through trials and tribulations.

Some of these tribulations are brought upon ourselves, by continuously allowing men to stay in power who care more about their power than the welfare of the people. So while political leaders convince us they can fix that which they broke, and popular religious leaders prove they care more about their coffers, the people continue planting the seeds of their own spiritual destruction by refusing to step away from the amusement Lucifer's minions has put in their hands to keep their minds preoccupied.

I beseech you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, to be strong and know that our Lord is coming, but we cannot say when. So open your eyes, and step away from that which has mesmerized your mind. Stop

allowing your hands to be a part of your own spiritual weakness. Help others see the truth by sharing the Gospel with them, and keep your mind in the Word so you can be ready in season and out of season to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.¹⁰⁶

We do not know how bad things will get, and while many of us will leave this vessel before our Lord arrives, know that your security is in the same promise He gave the Israelites when Moses led them through the desert of Sin.

"Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your GOD, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you."

(Deuteronomy 31:6)

So we should all;

"be confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ"

(Philippians 1:6)

GOD bless you and keep the faith by remembering;

"we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness."

(Ephesians 6:12)

I pray those who have ears to hear will hear His voice and call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

¹⁰⁶ 2 Timothy 4:2; 1 Peter 3:15

Chapter 22

A Journey To Bethlehem

(Disclaimer)

This chapter is an embellished story, so do not take it as inspired by GOD. I wrote this for entertainment, and thus it is but a figment of my active imagination mixed with some facts surrounding the times, the places and the characters.

When you think of the first story of Christmas, it's usually about Mary and Joseph looking down at their new born son in a manger, surrounded by barn animals and maybe a shepherd or two looking on. Angels singing praises of joy to the Lord Most High, and maybe even the star that is guiding the wise men from Babylon to the destination of the Jews Messiah.

We live at a time when children are born in sanitized hospital rooms with the best of care, before and after the mother gives birth. When we hear of stories of women giving birth at home, or alongside the road where the car had to pull over because the child would not wait, we are captivated and amazed of such a thing happening in today's world.

Yet, for the vast majority of man's history, women have given birth in conditions we would not expect our pet animals to give birth in. So when you consider what Mary had to endure in her last week leading up to the birth of her first child, I want you to consider the following. Then maybe, just maybe, you will look at the story of Christmas a bit differently than you have in the past.

When you consider that Luke was a Doctor, it kind of makes sense that his version of the Gospel is the only one that tells the story of the birth of Christ. It makes even more sense when you consider that Luke was not just a good friend and traveling companion, but he was also the Apostle Paul's Doctor. Another point of consideration is that, in Paul's

letter to the Galatians he wrote that he did not receive the Gospel from man, but from Christ Himself. So who better to know the events leading up to the birth of Jesus, than the man He shared it with.

“But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

(Galatians 1:11-12)

I ask that you allow yourself to truly see what it must have been like for a 16 year old pregnant wife and her husband in the week leading up to the birth of their first child. They were two humans with thoughts, feelings, and faith in their God who promised them their child would be special. Here are some of the particulars involved that they had to face.

“And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the Inn.”

(Luke 2:7)

“Mary and Joseph’s Journey To Bethlehem”

Joseph was in disbelief when he heard, so he asked a friend who was well informed of such matters of Roman affairs. Yes, his friend said, the news just recently arrived. The Roman Senate had ruled that the Jews would not be exempt from Emperor Caesar Augustus's decree on the census. Joseph thinks to himself, surely not now, not with Mary expecting a child. However, along with all the members of those from David's lineage, Joseph and his wife Mary, must register for the census in Bethlehem to pay their taxes. Many Jews spoke openly in those days of how, one day soon the Lord's anointed will free them from their bondage under the accursed Gentiles.

While they didn't like paying taxes to Rome, it was not the biggest problem they had with Rome. Their problem was being forced to be counted, because GOD had warned them in the Law they should not be counted. With King Herod's blessing, the Jewish leaders had argued all the way to the Roman Senate when they heard of the decree a few years earlier, but alas they failed to convince the Roman Senate. Most knew the Jewish leaders would fail. After all, the Senate had become nothing more than a rubber stamp for anything the Emperor desired to do. Now, unless they comply, the Romans would come down hard and make everyone's life miserable. Anyone not appearing at the appointed time could be fined or executed, and this is why Joseph closed his carpenter shop and rushed home to tell Mary the news.

"Mary, something dreadful has happened. The Jewish leaders have lost their argument before the Emperor. All Jews must also obey his census decree. We must go to Bethlehem and we must leave tomorrow morning."

Mary turns pale and begins to tremble in fear.

"But Joseph? How can I possibly go in my condition? It is near time for this Child to be born. I'm already feeling the urges and the pains get more and more powerful as the days go on. How can I ride all that way?"

Joseph pulls Mary to him, and holds her with a comforting embrace and tells her,

"Our Lord will look out for us. He will not desert us. Remember what we have seen and heard. That which our Lord has told us, will happen. I am convinced we will be fine. Why, I bet the Lord has a nice comfortable bed awaiting us in the Inn. All three of us will be OK."

Mary looks up to her husband and smiles as she draws strength and comfort from his words, and tells her husband.

"I will collect some food for our journey."

Joseph conveys strength for Mary so she will not be worried, but inside he cannot help but worry for his young bride who is with Child. Yet, he trusts the Lord, even if his heart is heavy.

As they eat their evening meal, Joseph tells his wife they must take the shortest way to Jerusalem, not the longer one through the plains. It will be more difficult, though. The 3000 year old trading route winds for 70 miles through the rocky highlands, so it will be hard on Mary. For protection, Joseph purchased a place in a caravan that is passing through. It will provide protection from bandits, bears, and mountain lions.

In the morning, Joseph prepares the donkey with enough blankets to make Mary as comfortable as possible. She won't be able to ride the whole way, since the donkey must also carry the items they need for the long journey. While he prepares the donkey, Mary collects the food and clothes she put together and heads out the door to join Joseph. She stops momentarily as she feels the baby kicking. She knows it will be soon, and prays the Child doesn't arrive during the long journey.

Joseph helps Mary onto the donkey, and they meet up with the caravan. It's a good group of people who are friendly. The conversation moves to Mary being pregnant, and how the Romans should be ashamed of themselves. What with them forcing pregnant women and children to travel so far from their home to be counted. The caravan leaves Nazareth in a cloud of dust and yapping dogs. The rich are in their chariots and wagons; the poor on donkeys and on foot. Mary smiles and reassures Joseph that she's very comfortable, but he knows she worries about the Child.

They begin the trip by descending from the high hills of Galilee, and they pass through the village of Nain. They have no idea that one day their unborn son, Jesus, will restore a widow's son to life in this village. As they leave Nain Mary observes Mount Tabor way off to the East, where her Son will one day be transfigured during a meeting with Moses and Elijah. The day is long, and the dust fills the air with dirt as the head towards Jerusalem some 65 miles to the South. Mary's back is

already aching terribly by day's end as she is exhausted. At night, she falls asleep in Joseph's arms as they lay on the ground.

The next day they reach the plain of Jezreel, carpeted with wildflowers that dot the landscape. However, Mary does not seem to notice much. She does not feel well and misses the comfort of her bed, because sleeping on the ground beside the trail is not easy for her. Joseph is also tired from walking the many miles guiding the donkey and its precious cargo. As they move along they talk about the miracles and God's plans for their future, while passing the many hours away as they follow the caravan to their destination.

As they travel down the road they are caught in some light rain, with a wind blowing that makes it difficult to keep dry. Joseph wraps a blanket around Mary, praying that it is enough to keep her from getting too wet. The Lord is gracious however as the rain only lasts a short time, keeping them from getting soaked or too cold. Another day goes by on the road as they continue making their way mile by excruciating mile plodding along as the days seem never to end. The caravan passes by the valley of Megiddo where Solomon kept his stables for his 900 chariots and horses. Joseph and Mary are unaware of it, but this is the place where the last battle of mankind will one day take place. A battle we now know will be called Armageddon. The place where the Child in her womb will come and put an end to Satan's reign.

The weather is cloudy again which is normal for this time of the year, and Joseph worries about being caught in the rain again. It seems that Mary is getting weaker as the miles go on. There are many miles yet to travel, so as he walks beside her, he prays and tries to draw courage from the dream he had. To give the donkey some rest Mary must walk every once in a while for a few miles. Joseph doesn't let her walk too much, but if they expect the donkey to be strong enough to traverse the mountain road to Jerusalem and Bethlehem, then Mary must walk at times to rest the Donkey.

As they continue climbing in elevation the trip now becomes increasingly difficult. It is a slow trodding journey, yet Joseph and Mary are excited to be in the places they have learned about in the

synagogue. Joseph looks to the East and sees Mount Gilboa, as he is reminded of the battle that took King Saul and his son Jonathan's life, and how David lamented the loss of his beloved friend.

*"O mountains of Gilboa, Let there be no dew nor rain
upon you, Nor fields of offerings. For the shield of the
mighty is cast away there! The shield of Saul, not
anointed with oil. From the blood of the slain, From the
fat of the mighty, The bow of Jonathan did not turn back,
And the sword of Saul did not return empty."*

(2 Samuel 1:21-22)

Mary and Joseph pass time by talking of the history of the area they are passing through. Like the area near the town of Dothan they are approaching, which long before it existed was the spot according to the Torah, where Jacob's sons sold their brother into slavery. In remembrance of that bitter time, they recite a psalm, as a special prayer to protect themselves from such trials as Joseph experienced.

*"They hurt his feet with fetters, He was laid in irons.
Until the time that his word came to pass, The word of
the LORD tested him. The king sent and released him,
The ruler of the people let him go free. He made him lord
of his house, And ruler of all his possessions, To bind his
princes at his pleasure, And teach his elders wisdom.
Israel also came into Egypt, And Jacob dwelt in the land
of Ham. He increased His people greatly, And made them
stronger than their enemies. He turned their heart to
hate His people, To deal craftily with His servants."*

(Psalm 105:16-25)

As the caravan keeps moving Mary feels the Child kick and move around as her back begins to ache with every step the donkey takes on the uneven road. The day drags on with mile after painful mile as Joseph notices that his young bride isn't smiling as much, and seems far

off in her thoughts. They stop for the night, and Joseph gently lifts her up off the burrow and comforts her with a loving hug and tells her,

“You know our Lord would not let anything bad happen to us. We must have faith that He will protect us.”

Mary sighs as she looks into the eyes of the man who has been so good to her and smiles as she replies,

“Yes, I know he will, Joseph. It’s just that sometimes the pain and weariness get to me.”

Joseph looks down at her and smiles back as tells her,

“Yes, me too. Come, let us eat. Then we can lie down and sleep for the evening. Tomorrow will be another day.”

The morning sun breaks over the horizon, as the caravan gets an early start. They now face the most difficult part of the day. Neither slept well on the ground, but today makes them especially thankful, because this day will mark the halfway point of their journey. They pass within ten miles of the Samaritan town of Shechem, as Mary yearns, as all Jews do, for a cool cup of water from Jacob’s well. One day Mary’s Child will visit the well, and a Samaritan woman will draw water for Him and receive salvation.

The journey is long, and one of the days will be on the Sabbath, which means a day of much needed rest for the weary and exhausted travelers of the caravan. Joseph will purchase some extra food and some hay for the donkey at a local village and they will eat with other travelers on the caravan. They sing Psalms and enjoy the Sabbath dinner together. At the end of the Sabbath day, Mary begins to look more rested as they both end the day with prayers and psalms to thank God for the much needed time of rest. Tonight will be the first night they get good sleep since before they began their journey. This is good, because the second half of the journey will make the first half seem like a picnic.

The next morning the caravan continues upon its journey traveling around Shiloh. There's not much left to give anyone an idea that it was one an important thriving community that was home to the now lost Ark of the Covenant. The now abandoned town sheltered in the tent of the Tabernacle, until the Philistines took it in a battle. Mary is reminded of the angel telling her the Child will be a Savior of her people. Makes one wonder if she ever thought of herself as a Traveling Living Ark!

Soon the caravan would reach Bethel. The place Abraham offered sacrifices to God, and Jacob dreamed of angels climbing up and down a ladder to heaven. As devout Jews, Joseph and Mary would pause for special prayers at this place. Mary does not know it now, but the Child she carries will also be offered as a sacrifice, but for the salvation of all of humanity.

As the journey progresses, the caravan comes upon the small wayside station of Ramallah. Here, at last, they get the first glimpse of the holy city of Jerusalem. Mary and Joseph can see the gold of the temple glittering in the sun 10 miles in the distance. With a full view of the land below, the couple join others in a psalm that has a wonderful mixture of soft melancholy and fiery patriotism to it. The hand that wrote it must have known how to kill with the sword as well as tune the harp. The words are burning with a poeticness from one's heart that is breathing undying love and hatred at the same time. Love for a home destroyed, and hate for the enemy who took their ancestors away into captivity. The words of the psalm echo throughout the caravan, as everyone's thoughts go back to a time long ago when their homeland was destroyed by the Babylonian invaders 600 years earlier.

*By the rivers of Babylon,
There we sat down, yea, we wept
When we remembered Zion.
We hung our harps
Upon the willows in the midst of it.
For there those who carried us away captive asked of us a song,
And those who plundered us requested mirth,*

*Saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"
 How shall we sing the Lord's song
 In a foreign land?
 If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
 Let my right hand forget its skill!
 If I do not remember you,
 Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth—
 If I do not exalt Jerusalem
 Above my chief joy.
 Remember, O Lord, against the sons of Edom
 The day of Jerusalem,
 Who said, "Raze it, raze it,
 To its very foundation!"
 O daughter of Babylon, who are to be destroyed,
 Happy the one who repays you as you have served us!
 Happy the one who takes and dashes
 Your little ones against the rock!
 (Psalm 137)*

When they finally arrive at Jerusalem, the streets are crowded with people from all over the kingdom, and it seems the whole city is filled with Roman soldiers. Joseph leads the donkey and his wife through the streets as they arrive at the home of Mary's first cousin, Elizabeth, and her husband Zacharias. They have a chance to finally see Elizabeth's son, John. He is in his mother's arms, waving his hands around as he kicks his legs in glee when Mary and Joseph appear. This six-month-old baby will one day be known as the prophet who baptizes people in the Jordan river. As they greet each other, their eyes are filled with tears and their hearts are overwhelmed with joy. They are the only people in the world who truly know about the tremendous news they all received from Gabriel.

After a while, as they sit around eating a dinner prepared by Elizabeth, they talk about the exploits of the journey the young couple had to endure. It seems like the exhaustion they felt from the journey

has abated as they pass the hours away talking about the things the Lord God is doing. None of these 4 adults truly understood the price their Children would one day pay for doing the LORD's will, as a few moments in time will overshadow all other moments in human history.

It's estimated that during the Passover in Jesus' day, as many as four million people would pass through the city. One can only guess how many were there during the census in 6 A.D. As the couples sat for dinner, just outside the walls of Zacharias' home, maybe as many as 2 million people were gathering for the census, with no clue as to the importance of the baby boy and the unborn Child inside a home just off the streets of Jerusalem.

That night Mary and Joseph would sleep in each other's arms as they enjoyed their first night of comfort since they left Nazareth. Their prayers are filled with thanksgiving and praise for the comfort of Zacharias' home, the meal Elizabeth fed them, and the cot to sleep on. They fall asleep fast, and Mary is comforted as Joseph holds her tight.

There are only ten more miles to travel before they reach Bethlehem. The next morning, while Mary visits with her cousin, Joseph busies himself in Jerusalem securing exit visas so he will not be hassled by the soldiers and tax collectors on the last leg of their journey. He finds himself stunned at the coldness of the city and its citizens as he passes the many people who never acknowledge each other, everyone just walks by without so much as a smile on their face. He sees the Roman barracks, the five great palaces and the huge Roman fortress named for Mark Antony. Then he sees the Temple with its eaves and pinnacles sheathed in pure gold.

When he returns to get Mary, they say their goodbyes to Zacharias, Elizabeth, and their newborn son John. Mary's time is very near and they wonder between them why God does not want the Child to be born in the city that is home to His Holy Temple? But it is not for them to question God's ways. It has already been a long day, and now they are getting a late start on the last leg of their journey. They are both looking forward to getting to Bethlehem where they can rent a room so they can

all be warm and comfortable as they were with Zacharias and Elizabeth.

Back on the road Mary is beginning to have labor pains. The closer they get to Bethlehem the closer the pains she experiences. As the donkey trods along, she closes her eyes and prays to Jehovah that His plans are not for her to have the Child on the side of the road. The sun has already begun to set, as they have less than five miles to go. It seems forever as they trod uphill listening to the sheep bleating in the distance. They see shepherds in the pastures tending their flock that will be sold in the marketplace for Temple sacrifices.

As Joseph walks alongside Mary, he sees the sheep. He is reminded of a conversation he had with a Rabbi once. The Rabbi told Joseph that the sheep raised outside of Bethlehem were the most perfect sheep in all of Judea. He wondered if he could ever afford such a great sacrifice for God. How could he ever know that long after he went home to be with the Lord, his wife would watch their Son become a replacement for the sheep in the field.

Finally in the darkness of the night the weary couple pass through the walls of Bethlehem. Into the home where King David himself was born and raised. Joseph is alarmed, because Mary's birthing pains have increased, as she tells him it feels like the time of their Child's birth is but hours away. Frantically, he seeks lodging. However, the town is swarming with other members of David's tribe and Joseph fears no lodging will be available. They come to an Inn reported to have an opening for travelers. Joseph helps Mary off the donkey, and brings her in with him. He prays they will see that she is with Child and have pity, and thus give them a room. They enter the busy Inn and ask the innkeeper,

"Excuse me sir, but do you have any rooms for rent?"

The answer is not what Joseph wanted to hear,

“I’m sorry. I’m full up tonight. The census has brought so many people into the area that we are full up. We even have strangers sharing rooms with each other. I just haven’t anything left.”

Joseph begs the innkeeper for any room,

“Please sir, you can see my wife is with Child and her time is near. She needs a room to birth our Child. Please sir, I will pay double what you charge. Triple even. Don’t you have something?”

Mary is visibly in pain as the Child kicks and the birth pains become closer and closer with more pain each time they come. She can barely stand, as one hand rests on her belly, and the other holds Joseph's hand. The innkeeper looks at Mary, and realizes her time of birth is near. He looks at Joseph and tells him,

“All I have is a stable out back. It isn’t clean, there are sheep and cattle in it, but at least you’ll be out of the weather. I feel terrible for you, but that’s the best I can do. Sorry.”

The innkeeper points to the stable and returns to his customers inside as Joseph leads the donkey with his wife towards a cave where shepherds keep their sheep. There are hay racks and mangers for the straw that fed the sheep and cattle toward the back of the cave, with the strong smell of manure lingering in the air. Joseph thinks to himself, surely this cannot be where the Baby will be born. Mary is trembling and is deep in pain now. Joseph helps her down from the burrow and helps her walk into the cave. He makes a bed of hay for her, and places the blanket from the donkey onto the straw. He helps her lie down and does his best to clean things up around her. He wants to help her, but not sure what to as he asks,

“Mary, what do I do? Let me go find help for you.”

Mary sees how frantic her husband is and tries to calm him down, and then it is time,

“Joseph no. There is no time. The Child is coming now.”

What happens next is what has happened billions of times before. A Child is born to a woman, as her husband offers all the help he can. Amidst the mooing of the cattle and bleating of the sheep, Mary cries out in pain. Joseph holds the Child's head as he guides it into the world. Soon there is a silence as he lays the Child upon Mary's bosom. Joseph goes out to start a fire for warmth and looks up into the night sky and sees a star so bright it seems to illuminate the whole town.

He then turns to look at his wife and Child and notices that the cave was also illuminated by a wonderful light. He looks to the heavens and says a prayer of thanks to God. Then a couple of shepherds came by and told a story about an angel who appeared from heaven while they were tending their sheep in the field. The angel told them a Child was born in the city of David, who is Christ the Lord, and they would find him wrapped in swaddling clothes in a manger.

With Joseph on his knees next to his wife, and the shepherds standing around looking down on Mary with the Baby Jesus in her arms, all seems perfect in the world. It seems like the world has changed, as the angels of God were singing. Today there is love, peace, and joy, but one day this little Lamb will cry out, "It is finished", and the price for our Salvation will have been paid in full.

God bless you all, and Merry Christmas.

Until Shiloh Comes

(Book Preview)

This final chapter covers a theory I have about Jacob's blessing to his son Judah, and how it relates to the day Jesus visited HIS Father's Temple when HE was 12 years old. While I originally wrote this as a complete stand alone commentary, I have since decided to use this chapter as a preview for a book I am planning to publish at a later date. While reading this chapter, I repeat my often stated advice to you, and that is to be a Berean by searching the Scriptures yourself. Please do not just blindly accept all I write, just because I wrote this book.

"Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so."

(Acts 17:10-12)

When trying to ascertain if a book written about a recent event is true, there are many good ways to go about the process. However, when the book in question was written so long ago that the people and places have long vanished into history, trying to know fact from fiction can be next to impossible. This is the problem we come across as we attempt to verify events and statements made in the Bible that took place 2000 to 6000 years ago. Thus the method we must depend upon is the use of the internal evidence we find that correlates with the transmission of writings, which themselves have been translated throughout the years into different languages as time has progressed. This evidence is then matched with external archeological and scientific proof which then confirms or rejects what is written in the ancient texts. That being said,

the most persuasive arguments confirming the reliability of the Scriptures can be found in the area of prophecy.

There are thousands of prophecies in the Bible, of which many have been fulfilled.¹⁰⁷ While I'm sure many theologians could debate the statistical number, truth be told, only GOD truly knows how many prophecies the Scriptures contain, which have come true, and how many have yet to be fulfilled. Anyone who studies apologetics understands the great importance of Messianic prophecies being one of the keys to demonstrating that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah. Thus, through the fulfilled prophecies we can prove without a doubt, that Jesus Christ is the One the ancients predicted would come.

As we read the Bible, we are confronted with many predictions, some came true within the lifetime of the prophecy being told, some took hundreds of years, some even took thousands of years, while others have yet to come true. However, most prophecies in the Scriptures are not always thought to be prophecies by the one writing about them. Case in point would be Isaiah, who truly believed many of his predictions had to do with king Hezekiah. Thus they are altogether unexpected prophecies until they have been fulfilled. It must be remembered that the strength of this evidence is greatly enhanced if the event is so unusual that the apparent fulfillment cannot possibly be explained away as some coincidence. One such prophecy is when Jesus predicted that HE would be betrayed, killed, and then rise from the dead in 3 days.

"Now while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up." And they were exceedingly sorrowful."

(Matthew 17:22-23)

There's no other book in history where a Man, predicted to be born, would then predict HIS own death and resurrection. It's theoretically

¹⁰⁷ Facts.net

impossible to calculate the probabilities of such predictions to come true. As we now know, there are many prophecies concerning the birth, life, and death of Jesus that have been fulfilled. One of these prophecies dates back to the time when the Patriarch Jacob blessed his 12 sons around 1650 B.C. Those blessings were prophecies about each son and their descendants. Through time, these prophecies were fulfilled from the first born to the last. However, Jacob's son Judah would receive the lion's share of the blessings.

"Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's children shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people. Binding his donkey to the vine, And his donkey's colt to the choice vine, He washed his garments in wine, And his clothes in the blood of grapes. His eyes are darker than wine, And his teeth whiter than milk."

(Genesis 49:8-12)

Jacob's prophetic blessings provide further evidence of GOD's supernatural power to foretell the future of His people, while revealing HIS plans to whomever He so desires. Through the years many have asked me why Jacob passed up the oldest brothers for Judah, when ancient traditions always favor the oldest son in inheritance. Without getting into the minutia involved in Jacob's blessings for all his 12 sons;¹⁰⁸ I do feel it incumbent upon me to point out the reason why the older 3 brothers were passed over for any special blessings.

Of all the sons, Joseph is the one who actually received the double portion of inheritance that was usually reserved for the first born son; however, Jacob did not pass on the patriarchal responsibility to him.

¹⁰⁸ Genesis Chapter 49

Maybe GOD didn't want to bring the Messiah through the family of Ham, since Joseph's wife was Egyptian. We truly will never know, but by using Judah, maybe GOD assured us that the Messiah would come from the line of Shem. However, I do believe the reason GOD gave a double portion to Joseph, which was reserved for the first born, is because of the injustice he received from his brothers. Thus his sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, were given equal blessings with their uncles, and thus each had their own tribe.¹⁰⁹

Many explanations have been offered why Judah was not punished in his blessings for his part in selling Joseph into slavery. While the Scriptures are silent on this, I believe there are 2 reasons why GOD chose Judah: 1.) Because Judah offered his own life and was willing to accept all the blame forever if he failed to bring Benjamin back while going to Egypt to get food and supplies;¹¹⁰ and 2.) Judah showed true honor by publicly admitting his guilt in how he treated his daughter-in-law Tamar.¹¹¹ As for the 3 oldest, Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, I offer the following facts that should satisfy any questions one may have as to why they were passed over.

Reuben was the first born of Jacob by Leah, and his fall from grace involved Bilhah, Jacob's concubine. Bilhah was a handmaid of Laban, whom he gave to his daughter Rachel as a handmaid, for a gift when she married Jacob.¹¹² When Rachel failed to have children, Rachel gave Bilhah to Jacob as a concubine to bear him children in her name. Later we learn that after Reuben went into Bilhah's tent to have an intimate relationship with her, Jacob found out.¹¹³ Now nothing more is written about the incident, until the day Jacob blessed his sons. That's when Jacob reminded Reuben of how he dishonored his father by going into Bilhah:

¹⁰⁹ Genesis 48:8-22

¹¹⁰ Genesis 43:9

¹¹¹ Genesis 38:1-30

¹¹² Genesis 29:29

¹¹³ Genesis 35:22

"Reuben, you are my firstborn, My might and the beginning of my strength, The excellency of dignity and the excellency of power. Unstable as water, you shall not excel, Because you went up to your father's bed; Then you defiled it—He went up to my couch."

(Genesis 49:3-4)

As for Simeon and Levi, they were guilty for the slaughter of Shechem; an evil act that was in retaliation for the rape of their sister Dinah, by the prince of Shechem.¹¹⁴ The prince was actually in love with Dinah, which does not condone what he did, but rather shows how he was willing to follow through and marry Jacob's daughter. Jacob agreed to the union, with a stipulation added by his sons, that all the men of Shechem will be circumcised. It was during the time of their healing when Dinah's brothers, Simeon and Levi, came into the town, murdered all the men of the city, including the king and his son, and then took away their sister Dinah, whom we never hear about again.

"Now it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and came boldly upon the city and killed all the males. And they killed Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah from Shechem's house, and went out.

The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city, because their sister had been defiled. They took their sheep, their oxen, and their donkeys, what was in the city and what was in the field, and all their wealth. All their little ones and their wives they took captive; and they plundered even all that was in the houses."

(Genesis 34:25-29)

Like he did with Reuban, Jacob reminded both of them of their wickedness while blessing them;

"Simeon and Levi are brothers; Instruments of cruelty are in their dwelling place. Let not my soul enter their council; Let not my honor

¹¹⁴ Genesis chapter 34

be united to their assembly; For in their anger they slew a man, And in their self-will they hamstrung an ox. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; And their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob And scatter them in Israel."

(Genesis 49:5-7)

There is much that I could share about the blessings Jacob handed down to his other sons; however, my purpose for sharing what I have has more to do with the reason Jacob chose Judah over his older brothers. When I say Jacob's choice, I probably should say GOD's choice, because just as Ballam¹¹⁵ could do nothing but bless the Israelites, so too Jacob could only speak the words impressed upon him by the Spirit of GOD.

To properly set the stage so that all the pieces of my theory are explained, I will touch upon a few parts of Jacob's prophetic blessing by offering this bit of information. Judah's name means "Praise", and this is important because GOD knows ahead of time everything that will, or could, happen. It's not a stretch to claim that the Spirit of GOD moved Judah's mother to name him Praise, because as it turns out, this is in and of itself a prophecy. By giving him this name, we learn how the tribe of Judah would be respected one day. Scriptural names given to individuals can be symbolically rich, while offering glimpses into the personal characteristics and circumstances of the individual's future. As you read the first verse of Jacob's blessing to Judah, pay close attention to the many specific words Jacob used. I also advise you to carefully pay attention to the ways these prophecies are fulfilled in the verses following the blessing.

*"Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise;
Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your
father's children shall bow down before you."*

(Genesis 49:8)

"Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and spoke, saying, "Indeed we are your bone and your flesh. Also, in time past,

¹¹⁵ Numbers chapters 22-25

when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel out and brought them in; and the LORD said to you, 'You shall shepherd My people Israel, and be ruler over Israel.' " Therefore all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD. And they anointed David king over Israel."

(2 Samuel 5:1-3)

"Now it came to pass when the king was dwelling in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies all around,"

(2 Samuel 7:1)

Judah earned praise when his brother's descendants bowed down and pledged their allegiance while anointing David as the undisputed king; as he prepared to put his hand upon the necks of his enemies, who would pay tribute to Israel.¹¹⁶

The next verse refers to Judah as a lion's whelp.

"Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him?"

(Genesis 49:9)

It was from this blessing that the lion became the image on the standard for the tribe of Judah. In Numbers, GOD had Moses line up the tribes into groups of three, with Issachar and Zebulun joining under Judah's standard, on the East towards the sunrise.

"On the east side, toward the rising of the sun, those of the standard of the forces with Judah shall camp according to their armies; and Nahshon the son of Amminadab shall be the leader of the children of Judah."

(Numbers 2:3)

The tribe of Judah would become fierce in battle and one day, like the lion is the king of all beasts, so too would a leader come from Judah

¹¹⁶ 2 Samuel 7:1-7; 2 Samuel 8:2; 2 Samuel 8:6, 1 Kings 4:20-28

to be the ruler over Israel. This is a fitting prophetic statement in Judah's blessing that points to the coming Messiah Jesus, as the forever Lion of Judah we read about in Revelation.

*"But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals."
(Revelation 5:5)*

With the prophetic blessing of (49:8-9) being fulfilled by David becoming the lawgiver who wields the scepter of power, we now move to the next prophetic blessing, where Jacob says the scepter shall not depart from Judah until the one it belongs to comes, or as some translation put it, "Until Shiloh Comes." (49:10) In order to properly cover all bases, I offer a few different translations of this verse, since there is a difference of opinion as to exactly what the translation should be. The first version I offer comes from the translation I have been using throughout this book, unless otherwise stated, the New King James Version, followed by the Hebrew text, the Greek text, and then 10 other translations:

*"The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes;
And to Him shall be the obedience of the people."
(Genesis 49:10 NKJV)*

*"לא־יסור שבט מיהודה ומחקה מבין רגליו עד
כִּי־יבא שִׁילָה וְלוֹ יִקְהַת עַמִּים:
(Genesis 49:10 Hebrew)*

*"The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, as long as men come to Shiloh; and unto him shall the obedience of the peoples be."
(Genesis 49:10 mechon-mamre (English Hebrew))*

"οὐκ ἐκλείψει ἄρχων ἐξ Ἰουδα καὶ ἡγούμενος ἐκ τῶν μηρῶν αὐτοῦ, ἕως ἂν ἔλθῃ τὰ ἀποκείμενα αὐτῷ, καὶ αὐτὸς προσδοκία ἐθνῶν."

(Γένεσις - Κεφάλαιο 49:10 Septuagint LXX Greek)

“A ruler shall not fail from Juda, nor a prince from his loins, until there come the things stored up for him; and he is the expectation of nations.”

(Genesis 49:10 Septuagint LXX English)

“The shevet (scepter) shall not depart from Yehudah, nor a Mekhokek (Lawgiver) from between his raglayim, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall be the obedience of the amim (peoples, nations).”

(Genesis 49:10 Orthodox Jewish Bible (OJB))

“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes, And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.”

(Genesis 49:10 NASB 1995)

“The scepter shall never depart from Judah, or the mace from between his feet, Until tribute comes to him, and he receives the people’s obedience.”

(Genesis 49:10 NAB Revised)

“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.”

(Genesis 49:10 ESV)

“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.”

(Genesis 49:10 RSV)

“The scepter turneth not aside from Judah, And a lawgiver from between his feet, Till his Seed come; And his [is] the obedience of peoples.”

(Genesis 49:10 RSV)

“The right to rule will not leave Judah. The ruler’s scepter will not be taken from between his feet. It will be his until the king it belongs to will come. The nations will obey that king.”

(New International Reader's Version (NIRV))

“The scepter or leadership shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until Shiloh [the Messiah, the Peaceful One] comes to Whom it belongs, and to Him shall be the obedience of the people.”

(Amplified Bible, Classic Edition (AMPC))

To help you keep track of my explanation, I decided to split verse (49:10) into parts “a” and “b”, the first being:

*“The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,”*

(Genesis 49:10a)

This first part is about the scepter, ruling staff, or law giver not leaving Judah. Of all the English translations I share, the only one that does not use the word “scepter”, is the English version of the Septuagint, which uses the word “ruler”. However, I find no discrepancy in that peculiar instance, because it's well known throughout history that a scepter was a symbol of power for the ruler whose hand it was in. So we see in the first part of this verse how the power over GOD’s people will be in the hands of the tribe of Judah. Other than this verse, the word scepter is used 18 more times in Scriptures;¹¹⁷ 4 of those times are in the book of Esther, where we find the best example of the power a scepter represents to the one wielding it.¹¹⁸

Esther is the story of a beautiful young Jewish girl living with her uncle during the time of the Persian diaspora, who found favor with King Ahasuerus and became his queen. After she became queen, an evil

¹¹⁷ Numbers 24:17; Psalm 45:6; 125:3; Isaiah 14:5; Ezekiel 19:14; 21:10; 21:13; Amos 1:5; 1:8; Zechariah 10:11; Hebrews 1:8

¹¹⁸ Esther 4:11; 5:2; 8:4

court official named Haman, persuaded the king to authorize the massacre of the Jewish people for not observing the laws and rituals of the empire. Upon learning of the pogrom, Queen Esther's uncle Mordecai, approached her for help in interceding for her people with the king to stop Haman's plot of killing all the Jews. In her response to her uncle's request, we learn about the power over life and death the person wielding the scepter holds.

*"Then Esther spoke to Hathach, and gave him a command
for Mordecai:*

*"All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces
know that any man or woman who goes into the inner court
to the king, who has not been called, he has but one law: put
all to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the
golden scepter, that he may live. Yet I myself have not been
called to go in to the king these thirty days."*

So they told Mordecai Esther's words."

(Esther 4:10-12)

The second part of this Scripture would be as follows,

*"Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall
be the obedience of the people."*

(Genesis 49:10b)

As we move to the second part of this verse, you must understand that the scepter is still the object of the blessing; however, the best manuscript evidence we have shows us that the word "*until*", is not used in an exclusive but rather in an inclusive sense. So the phrase, "*Until Shiloh Comes*," does not mark the limits of Judah's domination over the nation of Israel; for if it did, it would constitute a threat and not a blessing. Instead, the idea is that the sovereignty of Judah is brought to its highest point under the arrival of the one the scepter truly belongs to. So this verse tells us that the scepter must change hands, and when it does, it will be transferred from the tribe of Judah to Shiloh, the Messiah, of whom it truly belongs.

Strong's Concordance translates the Hebrew word, "Shiloh", as "tranquil" in English. Another word for tranquil is "peace." Undoubtedly, this word used by Jacob was referring to the "*Messiah*" who was soon to come. Isaiah gives HIM the epithet "*The Prince of Peace*"¹¹⁹; he then uses the same description by referring to those who spread the Gospel, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bring good tidings by proclaiming peace."¹²⁰ Continuing upon this path Isaiah writes how the Lord promises to, "...*extend peace to her like a river...*"¹²¹ This theme continues in this statement from Isaiah "...*great shall be the peace of your children...*"¹²²

Our Lord has many names: *Savior, Counselor, Everlasting Father, Bread of Life, Alpha and Omega, Good Shepherd, "I Am,"* and many more. Genesis 49:10 focuses on the epithet "*Shiloh,*" or "*Peace.*" It would be almost five hundred years after Jacob blessed Judah that Joshua had the Tabernacle moved to Shiloh.

"Now the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of meeting there. And the land was subdued before them."

(Joshua 18:1)

It wasn't long before the name Shiloh became synonymous with the Tabernacle. Fast forward three hundred more years and after David replaced Saul as King, it became obvious to the religious leaders exactly what Jacob's prophecy was pointing to. We don't see any realization in the Scriptures as to whether or not Samuel figured it out; but we do know Nathan did, because God told him to inform David that the Kingdom would not depart from his lineage:

"And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever."

(2 Samuel 7:16)

¹¹⁹ Isaiah 9:6

¹²⁰ Isaiah 52:7

¹²¹ Isaiah 52:7

¹²² Isaiah 52:7

Eventually, the town of Shiloh would be abandoned and the Tabernacle itself would be replaced by YEHWEH's Temple. Yet, through the writings of Jewish scribes we can get a glimpse of what they thought about Shiloh. What we learn is that "*Shiloh*" became synonymous with the Messiah they look forward to.

"Until Shiloh comes:"

"...this alludes to the King Messiah"

(Midrash Genesis Rabbah 98.8, ibid 99.9)

"The Messiah's name is Shiloh"

(Midrash Lamentations Rabbah I.16.51)

Targums are ancient Aramaic translations and paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible, and they are well known for referring to "*Shiloh*" as a name for the promised King, and Messiah. They understood this in the ancient world, and today they still understand it refers to a successor from David's lineage who will one day sit upon the throne as "King of Israel," and that person they believe will be the "Messiah," "Son of David." Their understanding is that the phrase used in Genesis 49:10 refers to the coming Messiah.¹²³

"Until the Messiah comes whose is the Kingdom"

(Targum Onkelos)

"Until the time King Messiah shall come whose is the kingship"

(Targum Neofiti I)

"Until King Messiah shall come, the youngest of his sons"

¹²³ Rashi ad loc., Sanhedrin 98b B.T.; Midrash Genesis Rabbah 98.8; 99.8; Tanchumah Vayehi 10; Midrash haGadol I.735-739; Journal of Philology Vol. XIV [1885] pp.4-22; Zohar in Gen. fol. 32. 4. & in Exod. fol. 4. 1. & in Numb. fol. 101. 2. Bereshit Rabba, fol. 98. sect. 85. 3. Jarchi & Baal Hatturim, in loc. Nachmanidis Disputat. cum Paulo, p. 53. Abarbinel. Mashmiah Jeshuah, fol. 10. 1. R. Abraham Seba, Tzeror Hammor, fol. 36. 4. & 62. 2.

(Targum Ps. Jonathan or Jerusalem I)

“The world was created for the sake of the Messiah.

What is this Messiah’s name?

The school of Rabbi Shila said:

His name is Shiloh, for it is written:

until Shiloh comes.”

(Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 98b, Rabbi Johanan)

*“Kings shall not cease from the house of Judah – until
the time of the coming of the King Messiah, to whom all
the dominions of the earth shall be subservient.”*

(The Search for the Messiah, Page 100, Dr. Mark Eastman)

Sadly, these same religious teachers were so busy searching the Scriptures (to justify their man-made traditions) that they failed to see their Messiah when HE was standing right before them. Time and time again they refused to accept the truth, even when it was right before their eyes. Jesus said it best when HE told them:

*“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have
eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.”*

(John 5:39)

Before I continue, I must respond to those who claim the scepter left Judah long before Jesus was born, because Herod the Great was not of Judaen descent. I must admit that claim is partially true, Herod was actually an Idumean, meaning he was a descendant of Jacob’s brother Esau. However, this is where we must go back in time to the days when the Southern Kingdom of Judah was taken into captivity by the Babylonians. After the land of Israel had lain desolate for some years the Idumeans, descendants of Jacob’s brother Esau, moved across the Jordan river and settled onto the free real estate that was far more attractive than rocky enclaves of Petra, the hole in the wall they lived in. Years later when Rome conquered the area, they renamed the region “Edumea”, after the Edomites who were living in the area by then.

Now go forward to the time when Judea was ruled by Judah's descendants, the princes of the Hasmonean dynasty. During the rule of the last true Hasmonean Priest/Prince Hyrcanus, the inhabitants of the area were all forcibly converted To Judaism, including the Idumeans, who by then, had lived in the area for over 400 years. Included in this area is a town called Mareshah, which is modern day "Beth Gurvin". Take a guess who was born in Mareshah? None other than the future King of Judea, Herod the Great.

So by blood Herod may have been Edomite, but because his father, King Antipater I, was a forced proselyte who believed and practiced the Jewish faith, Herod was born of a converted Jew even if he was a descendant of Esau. While he would go through the process of converting to Judaism after he became king to placate the desires of the Religious leaders, he was Jewish by adoption; so the scepter stayed in the hands of a legal Judean leader until 6 A.D.

This date is of extreme importance when speaking of the fulfilled Messianic prophecy that I am unfolding for you to see. For more than a thousand years, the scepter of power to practice capital punishment was in the hands of the Judean people. Whether it was during the years of the united or divided kingdom, during the captivity years, throughout the silent years, and even throughout the Herodian dynasty years when Archelaus was removed by Augustus; the leaders of Judah would exercise their right to execute citizens for crimes without any other power interfering. Yes, both the Babylonian and the Persian rulers allowed Judah to practice law and mete out justice as their laws dictated.

To get the year correct I need to go to the writings of Flavius Josephus in his work, "Antiquities of the Jews." He writes that the following events took place 37 years after Augustus Caesar defeated Mark Antony in the battle of Actium. The battle of Actium took place in 31 B.C. Add 37 years and we have 6 A.D.

"WHEN Cyrenius had now disposed of Archelaus's money, and when the taxings were come to a

conclusion, which were made in the thirty-seventh year of Caesar's victory over Antony at Actium...”
(Antiquities of the Jews, Book 18, Chapter 2, Section 1)

So 6 A.D. is the year, and Josephus tells us something else:

“NOW Cyrenius, a Roman senator, and one who had gone through other magistracies, and had passed through them till he had been consul, and one who, on other accounts, was of great dignity, came at this time into Syria, with a few others, being sent by Caesar to be a judge of that nation, and to take an account of their substance. Coponius also, a man of the equestrian order, was sent together with him, to” have the supreme power over the Jews. “

(Emphasis added)

(Antiquities of the Jews, Book 18, Chapter 2, Section 1)

Even the esteemed Erwin Ramsdell Goddenough, who was a scholar in the study of the influence of Greek culture on Hellenistic Judaism, wrote that it's his belief the Romans removed the power of execution from Judea in 6 A.D.

“The Greeks in Cyrene were allowed by Augustus, in a decree of 6 B.C., full judicial rights in everything short of the death penalty - this was reserved to the Roman governor, according to the customary provincial administrative. It would logically follow historical precedents that the Jews would also lose the ius gladii (literally, "the right of the sword, i.e., the legal right of a group of people to exercise capital punishment). This took place for the Jews in 6 A.D., when their land became a Roman province.”

(Erwin Ramsdell Goddenough)

It seems to me that God allowed these facts to be found so that we could connect them with what Josephus wrote later. The fact that history proves Rome did indeed remove the power of executing citizens once an area became a province of Rome, adds secular proof to what

we already know is fact from the Scriptures. This little historical fact buttresses my theory even more.

The act of removing Judea's scepter, when Rome annexed the area as a Roman province in 6 A.D., is the reason the Jewish religious authorities had to send Jesus to Pilate to be executed. They told Pilate it was unlawful for them to put anyone to death.

"Then Pilate said to them, "You take Him and judge Him according to your law." Therefore the Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death,"
(John 18:31)

In 6 A.D., we see part of Jacob's prophecy being fulfilled. In essence, Judea lost their power to execute citizens for the first time since David became King; because the scepter was officially removed. What did Jacob tell his son?

*"...the scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,
Until Shiloh Comes;"*
(Emphasis added)
(Genesis 49:10)

So where's Shiloh, the Messiah? Well, let's read one more passage in Josephus's book:

"As Coponius, who we told you was sent along with Cyrenius, was exercising his office of procurator, and governing Judea, the following accidents happened. As the Jews were celebrating the feast of unleavened bread, which we call the Passover, it was customary for the priests to open the temple-gates just after midnight."
(Antiquities of the Jews Book, 18, Chapter 2, Section 2)

Interestingly, Josephus writes about the Passover feast which takes place at the exact time the new procurator (Governor) will be in town. The very same week Judea would lose their Scepter, a family will be attending the same Passover feast with their 12-year old boy named Jesus, the very age Luke tells us Jesus was in his Gospel:

“His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know it but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day’s journey, and sought Him among their relatives and acquaintances. So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, “Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously.” And He said to them, “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them.”
(Luke 2:41-50)

There are many historical writings that confirm it was a normal procedure for Rome to remove the power of life and death from the rulers of areas they annexed as Provinces. This is not debatable; only those who wish to hold onto their own preconceived ideas will debate this fact.

This is where I need to address some Judean and Roman history that involves the Herod family, in order to properly understand the reason GOD warned Joseph in a dream to stay clear of Archelaus and instead go to Galilee on his return from Egypt.

“Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, “Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child’s life are dead.” Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the

land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

(Matthew 2:19-23)

In 63 B.C., when Pompey entered Jerusalem as arbiter in the civil war between John Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus I, Judaea, in effect, became a puppet state of the Romans. Eventually a civil war broke out in Rome between Julius Caesar and Pompey, and Herod the Great's father, the Idumaean Antipar, sided with Julius Caesar. After defeating Pompey, Caesar made Antipar the ruler of Judea. In 43 B.C. Antipar was assassinated, and by 37 B.C. Herod was able to use his influence and friendship with Mark Anthony and Octavian to secure Judea as his kingdom, to which Herod was king until his death in 4 B.C.

Prior to his death, Herod had changed his will many times due to his paranoia, even murdering a few of his sons. Eventually, Herod became so ill that death was imminent, and everyone understood that his younger son Antipas was chosen as his successor. However, just hours before he died, Herod again changed his will, thus naming his eldest son, Archelaus, as the new king. This was something many were shocked at, because Herod did not believe his eldest son could properly rule. However, because Judea was a client kingdom, the emperor of Rome had the last word as to who would succeed Herod the Great.

Caesar Augustus finally decided that neither son would be given the title of King. Instead, Archelaus was called an "ethnarch," or ruler of a people over the region of Judea, while Antipas was called a "tetrarch," which means a ruler over a fourth, or over all of Galilee. As the ruler of Judea, Archelaus still had the power to put anyone to death as he pleased, and pleased he did. For 10 years, from 4 B.C. until 6 A.D, Archelaus killed thousands of Jewish religious leaders, replaced several high priests, plus he diverted badly needed water from the

people of Jerusalem to his refurbished palace in Jericho. He ensured Judea's fate would be to lose any semblance of independence from Rome they had left. Eventually, a delegation of religious and secular leaders, along with Archaeus's own brothers, would travel to Rome to plead with Augustus to dispose of Archelaus. After hearing their complaints, Augustus removed Archelaus, banishing him to Gaul, and officially turning Judea into a Roman Province in 6 B.C.

So many things would change if just one prophecy concerning Jesus did not come true. Imagine if Herod did not change his will in the last hours of his life, then Antipas would have become the ruler of Judea instead of his older brother Archelaus. This is a legitimate consideration, because as it turned out Antipas's rule of Galilee, from 4 B.C. to 39 A.D., was one of little trouble for Rome. He was an amicable ruler who never tried to create problems with either Rome or the Jewish religious leaders. If Antipas had been the ruler of Judea instead of Archelaus, then there is a good possibility that Rome never would have had a reason to remove him from power.

Think about it. Until Augustus was approached by a delegation of religious and secular leaders, he was not considering the removal of Archelaus. So if Antipas had been the ruler of Judea, and he ruled as he did in Galilee, then why would Augustus feel the need to remove him? If he did not, then Judea most likely would not have been turned into a Province of Rome, and then Coponius would not have been sent to become their first Governor, which means Judea would not have lost the scepter and the right to put anyone to death. Taking it one step further, Luke may not have been moved by the Holy Spirit to record the incident of Jesus being at HIS Father's Temple at 12 either. Why you may ask?

Well, because Joseph would not have been told to stay clear of Judea when they returned from Egypt. GOD had a reason HE did not want HIS SON in Judea. That reason was Archelaus. So if Antipas was the ruler instead, then why would GOD need HIS SON to go to Galilee? If Jesus had been in Judea the whole time, then HIS visiting the Temple at 12 during the yearly Passover Feast would not have been out of the

ordinary, and the Holy Spirit would not have led Luke to record an incident that happened every year. However, history tells us that Archaelaus was as evil as his father, and because of his disastrous rule Rome removed him from power. This meant the threat he posed to Jesus was now gone, and thus we read in Luke's account.

“His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast.”

(Luke 2:41-42)

Please notice that Luke did not write, *“The family went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.”* He wrote *“HIS parents went.”* It is in the next sentence where Luke writes, *“when He was twelve years old, they went.”* In my opinion, there are only 2 reasons Luke would make a distinction in how he related the facts to the reader: 1.) Because this is the first time since the purification ceremony that Jesus had a chance to make it to HIS Father's House. 2.) Because the scepter of Judah was removed at the same time Jesus was about HIS Father's business inside HIS Father's Temple. As I pointed out earlier, Josephus tells us that the new Governor Coponiust, arrived the same week, in the same year when Jesus and HIS family were attending the Passover. If GOD did not want HIS SON to live in Judea when Archaelaus was ruling, then why would HE want Joseph and Mary to take HIS SON to attend the Passover Feasts during his rule?

As I stated, Archaelaus had murdered thousands of Jewish Religious leaders, many of which were in the Temple at the time. So it makes no logical sense that GOD would not be concerned for HIS SON's safety, especially in the light of the evidence from Scripture that HE had warned Joseph twice to avoid the danger HIS SON was in. Once Joseph was warned to take Jesus to Egypt, the second time HE told Joseph in a dream to go to Galilee instead of Judea.

Continuing along this line, Jesus and the issue of who will have the scepter are on a collision course. Never forget, that when it comes to prophecy, GOD's messages to HIS prophets are never wrong, and as

such the scepter had to be removed, but not just because of the prophecy involving Jacob's blessing to his son Judah; it also had to be removed to fulfill Jesus' prophecy that HE would be crucified one day, otherwise the religious leaders would have just stoned HIM as a heretic;

*“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,
even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,”*
(John 3:14)

Some may claim this prophecy by Jesus is irrelevant because the quote comes about 20 years after the scepter of rule was removed; however, Jesus was specifically relating to an incident that took place many years earlier. It was a time when GOD sent poisonous serpents to punish the people for their stubborn disobedience.¹²⁴ When the people realized that GOD was angry with them, HE had Moses fashion a bronze serpent onto a pole and lift it up so that the Israelites could look upon the symbol of which was the cause of their possible death, so that they would be cured. Thus Jesus mentioning the lifting of the bronze snake in the desert was a 1450-year old prophetic moment that pointed to the manner in which the SON of GOD would be put to death. Jesus was reiterating a prophecy which HE Himself must fulfill, A prophecy of how Jesus will die because of the removal of Judea's scepter in 6 A.D.

*“So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a
pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone,
when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.”*
(Numbers 21:9)

Over 1400 years later in 6 A.D. the new Roman Governor, Coponius, would arrive in Jerusalem the week of the Passover. Upon his arrival, Judea would lose their right to carry out capital punishment. The scepter had been removed from Judah!

¹²⁴ Numbers 21:5-9

*“The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,
Until Shiloh Comes;”
(Emphasis added)
(Genesis 49:10)*

It was big news that Herod's son was removed from power, and even bigger news that Rome was not appointing any other descendant of Herod to be sovereign King. Thus, for the first time in almost 50 years Judea would be free of a King they despised. Instead, they now had to deal with various Governors of Rome, under which, for the first time in Israel's existence as a nation, the people of Judea would not have the right to administer capital punishment. They lost the scepter, a symbol of absolute power over everything, including life.

As you can see this is a very important part of Jacob's prophecy being fulfilled, one that will play a significant role in GOD's plan of offering mankind a chance for forgiveness of our sins and eternal salvation. Shiloh has come, and no one recognized HIM. The scepter of their power was removed, and they were not looking for Shiloh, their Messiah. There would be many more times when the religious leaders would not know their Messiah had come, so many that eventually the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes, would just accuse GOD of doing miracles with Satan's help.

When I first read the account of Jesus in the Temple at 12, I was baffled as to why it was even added. After all, writing what a child did is something modern scholars do, not ancient ones. They knew that nothing a child does was worth wasting precious parchments on. Only in modern times do we give children credit for things they have yet to truly accomplish. The account of Jesus at 12 could only have been added for one purpose, and one purpose only. It fulfilled a prophecy about an event that would take place 1900 years after Jacob blessed his son.

While the Child born of Mary is unique, because HE is the Messiah, Mary is not the only one who has been given a heads up by GOD, an

angel, or a prophet that a child would be born to them; Isaac,¹²⁵ Samson,¹²⁶ Samuel,¹²⁷ the Shunammite woman,¹²⁸ and John the Baptist¹²⁹ come to mind. Truth be told, the prophecy of Jesus coming many years in advance is not the only time such a long distance prophecy was made. The coming of Josiah was prophesied by name almost 300 years in advance.¹³⁰ So prophesying the birth of a child to come is not unique in the Scriptures.

As for recording the incidents of a childhood moment, we do find references of others mentioned in the Scriptures: like Ishmael,¹³¹ Isaac,¹³² Joseph,¹³³ Samuel,¹³⁴ David,¹³⁵ Solomon,¹³⁶ Jehoash,¹³⁷ Manasseh,¹³⁸ and Josiah¹³⁹. The mention of these individuals were all in reference to them either being born after their birth was prophesied, because they were of royalty, or because the extra information was needed to properly understand a situation that would come up later in history. An example of needed information would be the time Mephibosheth's nurse dropped him as a child and he became lame in his feet.¹⁴⁰ (paraplegic maybe). This information allows us to tap into our memory when we read how David wanted to extend kindness to Saul's family for Jonathan's sake.¹⁴¹ This information is needed to

¹²⁵ Genesis 17:19; Genesis 18:1-15

¹²⁶ Judges 13:1-25

¹²⁷ 1 Samuel 1:20-28;

¹²⁸ 2 Kings 4:8-17

¹²⁹ Luke 1:-25

¹³⁰ 1 Kings 13:2

¹³¹ Genesis 16:11-16; 17:18-26; 21:8-21

¹³² Genesis 17:19-21; 21:1-7; (22:1-19 the age of Isaac, when Abraham to offer him as a sacrifice is debatable, since some scholars like Josephus, Adam Clark, Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown all believe he was a young adult at the time)

¹³³ Genesis 30:25; 33:7

¹³⁴ 1 Samuel 1:20-28; 2:18-26; 3:1-19

¹³⁵ 1 Samuel 16:18-23;

¹³⁶ 2 Samuel 12:24-25;

¹³⁷ 2 Kings 11:1-21

¹³⁸ 2 Kings 21:1

¹³⁹ 2 Kings 22:1

¹⁴⁰ 1 Samuel 4:4

¹⁴¹ 2 Samuel 9:1-13

understand why David would be sure Mephibosheth had servants to help him work the land so he could eat.

I offer this information on the Scriptures mentioning children to help you understand why there must be a reason for Luke to record the day Jesus visited the Temple with HIS parents when HE was only 12 years old. Other than an extra tidbit which is not needed, it has to correlate with another reason. Let us take into consideration all the incidents mentioned in the Gospels about Jesus' childhood. Other than HIS birth and when HE was 12, there are five moments which the Gospels record about HIS childhood:

- 1.) The time Jesus was dedicated at the Temple on His 8th day. This fulfilled the ceremonial requirement of circumcision.¹⁴²

*“And on the eighth day the flesh of his
foreskin shall be circumcised.”*

(Leviticus 12:3)

- 2.) This second incident recorded by Luke is a powerful moment, because it not only mentions that the ceremonial regulation of purification was fulfilled;¹⁴³ but it also reveals to us that a promise by the Holy Spirit to an old man was fulfilled, that he would not die before he saw the Messiah.¹⁴⁴ While blessing the child, Simeon also prophesies that a sword will pierce Mary's soul as her Son is rejected by some and embraced by others for the benefit of the world.¹⁴⁵

“When the days of her purification are fulfilled, whether for a son or a daughter, she shall bring to the priest a lamb of the first year as a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or a turtledove as a sin offering, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then he shall offer it before the LORD, and make atonement for her. And

¹⁴² Luke 2:21;

¹⁴³ Luke 22:24

¹⁴⁴ Luke 2:25-27

¹⁴⁵ Luke 2:28-35

she shall be clean from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who has borne a male or a female.”

(Leviticus 12:6-7)

- 3.) Jesus was no longer a newborn, instead HE was closer to 2 years old when the wise men from the East (magi), visited the family to worship the King of the Jews¹⁴⁶

*“Because of Your temple at Jerusalem,
Kings will bring presents to You.”*

(Psalm 66:29)

*“The kings of Tarshish and of the isles Will bring presents;
The kings of Sheba and Seba Will offer gifts.”*

(Psalm 72:10)

!!!Spoiler Alert!!!

“When you set up your nativity scene for Christmas, be sure to place the magi outside and down the street, as it would be two years before they arrived to see Jesus.”

- 4.) Then we come to the time when Herod decided to murder all the children, because he feared the coming of the rightful Heir to David’s throne. Joseph was warned in a dream by an angel of the Lord to take Him the Child to Egypt,¹⁴⁷ thus fulfilling the prophecy of Jeremiah

*“Thus says the LORD: “A voice was heard in
Ramah, Lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel
weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted for
her children, Because they are no more.”*

(Jeremiah 31:15)

- 5.) The fifth moment actually fulfilled 2 prophecies about Jesus:

1st - GOD calling HIS Son out of Egypt, We read that Joseph was again contacted by an angel in a dream that Herod had died

¹⁴⁶ Matthew 2:1-12

¹⁴⁷ Matthew 2:13-15

and that he should bring the Child and His mother back to Israel.¹⁴⁸

*“When Israel was a child, I loved him, And
out of Egypt I called My son.”*

(Hosea 11:1)

2nd - On their way back from Egypt, Joseph again heard from GOD in a dream, and this time he was told to avoid Judea because Herod's son Archelaus was on the throne, instead he was told to take his family to Galilee and he settled in Nazareth. Fulfilling what was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

*“There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse,
And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.”*

(Isaiah 11:1)

The greek word Nazareth is Nazōraios which derives it's name from the Hebrew word for roots which is (נֶזֶר) *netzer*:

*“{netzer means root or shoot} So long as even a
tiny part of their **root** system remains, they will
always come back. And when they do, they rise from
the ground or a stump. As spoken by the prophets
means they spoke that the (shoot of David), or the
(root of David), will come}.”*

Each of these five incidents was recorded to prove that Jesus had fulfilled either GOD's ceremonial requirements or a prophecy. Well, there was nothing ceremonial about Jesus visiting the Temple when HE was 12. Thus, the only explanation we can come up with as to why Luke mentioned Jesus visiting the Temple at 12, was to specifically prove that a prophecy was being fulfilled, and the only one that fits is Genesis 49:10. GOD is a logical rational being Who does nothing out of a vacuum; which means everything HE does and everything HE says has a meaning connected to it. It's my belief that this is the only rational

¹⁴⁸ Matthew 2:16-23

and logical reason for the Holy Spirit to move LUKE to record this incident. There can be no other reason.

In my investigation concerning the scepter being removed from Judah, I have read hundreds of commentaries and listened to countless sermons by well respected pastors from many different denominations. Through the years there have been some who have come close to agreeing with my theory, like Josh Mcdaniel,¹⁴⁹ Mark Eastman,¹⁵⁰ and John Darby¹⁵¹ just to mention a few. While they all agree that the removal of the scepter points to a time when Jesus would come, none of them relates it to Luke's account of Jesus visiting GOD's Temple at 12 years old.¹⁵² They all claim that because Jesus was alive and in the vicinity at the time, the prophecy was fulfilled. For me, their reasoning lacks credibility, since we could use the same explanation for many fulfilled prophecies. When someone asks how Jesus fulfilled it, we can just say, "HE was alive and living in the general area when it happened."

I, for one, am baffled as to why more scholars have not delved deeper into this passage as to why Luke wrote it. Some may argue with me that I am way off base; however, I believe there's more evidence pointing to me being correct than there is for many incidents that we are told are fulfillments of prophecies; many that have little evidence other than a small passage in the Scriptures. By the way, I do not dispute any of them. I believe all the prophecies that are mentioned as being fulfilled to be true. This is just one more prophecy, but it's a huge one that many scholars throughout the years have ignored, or at least never even considered to investigate, especially since the evidence has been before us since the time Josephus wrote his historical accounts in 94 A.D.

When I consider the reason why an event that took place during Jesus' childhood was recorded in the Gospels, I can only surmise they

¹⁴⁹ Josh Mcdaniel "Evidence That Demands A Verdict"

¹⁵⁰ Mark Eastman, "The Time of Messiah's Coming,"

¹⁵¹ John Darby (1800-1882), Founder of the Plymouth Brethren Church

¹⁵² Luke 2:41-52

were mentioned so that we would know that a Prophecy or ceremonial requirement by God has been fulfilled. After all, I'm sure that between HIS mother and HIS family members, there were many stories told about HIS childhood when HE did things that baffled family, friends, and neighbors. We all have read or heard stories that claim to be true about Jesus. One such story comes from the apocryphal book, "Infancy Gospel of Thomas"¹⁵³ It claims that when Jesus was a young boy a baby bird fell from its nest and died. The young GOD Child picked up the bird and brought it back to life. This was written in the late 2nd century, and not by the apostle Thomas who had been dead for over 100 years by then. Thus, without Scriptural proof, this story of Jesus and the baby bird is but the concoction of someone's overactive imagination.

While I'm convinced that Luke wrote the account of Jesus being in the Temple of GOD at 12 years old, specifically to prove that a prophecy or ceremonial requirement was fulfilled, I understand that this is still just a theory. As I stated in the beginning of this chapter, I'm currently working on a book that will go even deeper into all the aspects surrounding this theory of mine. In this preview of my upcoming book, I have attempted to prove my theory by offering evidence from Jewish historians like Josephus, secular historical timelines, and Scriptural records that show how the scepter of law was transferred from Judah into the hands of Shiloh who had come to HIS Father's House when HE was 12 years old.

I pray that those who have ears to hear will listen to GOD's voice and call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

¹⁵³ Apocryphal, "Infancy Gospel of Thomas",
<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/infancythomas-hock.html>

epilogue

In this book I have attempted to open your mind's eye to help you understand some difficult passages, while offering advice on how to walk circumspectly in a world that is quickly devolving into chaos. I would like to remind you that GOD gave us all the ability to read HIS Word. By doing so, it has become incumbent upon us to search, study, and understand HIS Word. While there are many godly teachers to help guide us all on difficult subjects, we are specifically told by GOD:

"Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."

(Deuteronomy 11:18-19)

As Christians, we cannot simply rely upon others to inform us about the Word of GOD. Attending church once a week to be fed, while seldom if ever reading HIS Word will not help the soul grow closer to its Lover. GOD Created us to be in fellowship with HIM, and to do so we must be reading HIS Word on a regular basis. I reiterate what I have said a few times throughout this book, and that is, we are to be like the Bereans, who searched the Scriptures daily to learn if what they were told is true, and backed up by Scripture.¹⁵⁴

It is the responsibility of each and every one of us to read the Word daily, and to read it to our children daily. When you depend upon someone else to tell you what the Bible says, then you put yourself in jeopardy of falling for lies that could lead you and your children's souls straight to hell. On judgment day, GOD is not going to give you a mulligan because you were too lazy to read HIS Word. I also suggest

¹⁵⁴ Acts 17:10-12

everyone to begin reading your Bible from cover to cover at least once a year. As you do, you will be pleasantly surprised by the many nuggets you will stumble upon, like the ones I have shared with you in this book.

I pray that those who have ears to hear will listen to GOD's voice and call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

About The Author

I am but a humble child of Christ, who has been given the gift of writing. The topics of my interests have varied through the years, with Christian commentary being the one mainstay. I write mostly for my own website, “The Reason For My Faith.” (trfmf.com) As a Christian writer, I try to keep up on things happening around the world that affect my brothers and sister in Christ. Jesus tells us in Mark 10:16;

“Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves”

It is with this understanding that I approach life, I guess that is why I consider it every Christian’s duty to understand the world we live in. If we pray for wisdom, God will grant us the knowledge and understanding we need to know the truth. Then we will be able to properly survive in the world we live in. Unfortunately, the world is oftentimes ruled by those who think they have gained the knowledge needed to rule us. Yet they reject the One True GOD, and thus they lack the wisdom needed to use the knowledge they have gained. The result is they have been educated beyond their own intelligence. Solomon tells us in Proverbs 9:10,

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And
the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

So with no knowledge of the Holy One, they cannot discern what is right or wrong, what is good or bad. It’s with this understanding that I feel it incumbent upon me to share with others that which He has blessed me with. Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you.